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'Essenced to Language': The Margins of Isaac Rosenberg

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Abstract

Isaac Rosenberg was more than just a war poet, and a general failure to take this into consideration has contributed to the belated recognition of the distinctions of his work. He started writing long before the Great War and, as a working-class London Jew, he schooled himself to respond to issues of class, culture, art and poetry. It was this combination of dependency and self-sufficiency which sustains his mature work; and which gave him a sense of himself as an Anglo-Jewish poet.

In order to illuminate Rosenberg, Chapter One considers the conditions of the Jewish community in the East End of London at the turn of the century, and examines the writer's attitudes to the Zionism in vogue at the time. Chapter Two investigates the striking echoes of Freudian psychology which feature in Rosenberg's work, and which are related to the Jewish heritage of both writers. Chapter Three investigates Rosenberg's feminine principle, suggesting that, as part of an Orphic vision of art, it fused an allegorical 'female god', with seductive females familiar from Jewish narratives, effectively combining English and Hebrew cultures.

Chapter Four traces Rosenberg's working-class literary heritage, and suggests that his treatment of class differs from his Gentile contemporaries in that it parallels Freudian and Marxist perceptions, while manifesting a modern Jewish insight. Chapter Five details the role class and race played in the critical marginalising of Rosenberg; special attention is given to the 'Georgian' literary ideals of the period, against which Rosenberg reacted and which influenced his reputation and the reception of his poetry. Chapter Six focuses on Rosenberg's debts of origin, and his 'anxiety of influence', uncovering his revision of his precursors, in light of a modern urban, and Jewish perspective. The thesis concludes by examining Rosenberg's idea of language as a vehicle for mental essence, suggesting that the roots for this perception lie in the painter's mind, along with class and race associations.

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List of Abbreviations

CW: Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works Of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. Ian Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984)

CPW: Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960-77)

SE: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74)

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*In memory of King Hussein,
to my country and my parents*

Introduction: 'The Doomed Mouth'

Rosenberg is long dead, but his words are still capable of speaking for him:

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
"Dead Man's Dump" (lines 27-9)¹

The final verb on line 28 carries a peculiar energy, as a 'half used life', perhaps borne on a stretcher, is allowed to 'pass' before the onlookers, who stand aside respectfully; and then, while the preposition, 'out', clings tenaciously to the verb across the *enjambment*, only to expire early in the following line, the life force emerges from 'those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth' in the form of dying breath; or, perhaps, haemorrhaging body fluid.

This is Rosenberg at his radical best; the lines draw attention to that "sense of something hidden and felt to be there," (*CW*, 260) which he claimed existed in all verse, and which the present study attempts to discover in his own writing. In that same letter to Edward Marsh he also said: "poetry should be definite thought and clear expression, however subtle; I don't think there should be any vagueness at all" (*CW*, 260); and so where Owen writes of 'doomed youth', Rosenberg's gazing at 'nostrils' and 'mouth' here is far less abstract. It is, instead, 'essenced to language', and the point at which words begin to fail: "where the words lose their interest as words[,] and a living and beautiful idea remains." (*CW*, 198). For Rosenberg, words, like the hapless infantry man, were expendable, serving only to detonate his ideas: "Now when my things fail to be clear I am sure it is because of the luckless choice of a word that would flash my idea plain as it is to my mind." (*CW*, 260).

Perhaps it because of such unique vision that Rosenberg still lives in the margins of modern English poetry, his voice entombed in "the fragments of the broken years." (*CW*, 277). As Joseph Cohen, Rosenberg's most persuasive

¹ Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. Ian Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979) repr. 1984, p. 110. Further references will be cited in parentheses and abbreviated as *CW*.

champion, puts it: "beginning with Eliot in 1920, critics have emphasised the significance of his poetry without telling us precisely why we should read it and bless his memory."² T. S. Eliot had asked: "Let the public, however, ask itself why it has never heard of the poems of T. E. Hulme or of Isaac Rosenberg... let the public also notice, in every case, who was the publisher. It will see, in the end, that the disease of contemporary reviewing is only a form of radical malady of journalism."³ It was hardly a recommendation; instead Rosenberg, appreciated, but unread so soon after his death, had been recruited for Eliot's crusade against the conservatism of contemporary publishers. Commenting fifteen years after the publication of the 1922 volume of Rosenberg's poems, F. R. Leavis wrote that it was "disquieting now to think that the volume did not establish Rosenberg's reputation. Even Mr. Eliot, who stopped to call attention to Rosenberg, appears to have left him with a passing mention."⁴ Yet despite this, in the remainder of his career, "Dr. Leavis followed Mr. Eliot's example."⁵

The critical heritage of Rosenberg (such as it exists) incorporates many incidental suggestions and claims, which this thesis will develop. Jon Silkin alleged that: "it is uncertain how much Rosenberg's working-class origins and Jewishness contributed to his comparative oblivion between the two wars, but it is not a factor to be dismissed."⁶ Perhaps not; but, equally, echoing Eliot's earlier proposition, there needs to be an awareness of the materialistic and elitist nature of the period's criticism, publishing and reviewing, so clearly revealed in Rosenberg's work. In "The Door Knocker", Rosenberg commented on the materialism that controlled poets, particularly those belonging to the underprivileged classes; hence the poet suffered the fact that "[P]ropaganda is a necessary evil." (*CW*, 280). In fact, Rosenberg's many critical insights were overlooked in previous studies of his work,

² Joseph Cohen, "Isaac Rosenberg: From Romantic to Classic", *Tulane Studies in English*, 10, 1960, p.129.

³ T. S. Eliot, "A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry", *Poetry Bookshop Chapbook*, 1920.

⁴ F. R. Leavis, "The Recognition of Isaac Rosenberg" in *Scrutiny*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1937). p. 229.

⁵ E. O. G. Davies, "Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, Univ. of Nottingham, 1975, p. 207.

⁶ Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), pp. 273-74.

except for a passing reference made by Charles Eglington who alleged that "Isaac Rosenberg was not only a poet; his desire for expression showed itself in his criticism which, though often crude, was most acute and sensitive."⁷ Rosenberg's critical pronouncements against the materialistic, elitist and high-minded controls under which literacy and literature fell, can -- it will be argued -- be related to those of Matthew Arnold, his contemporaries and followers, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis and others. But it is understandable that Rosenberg's propositions - so neatly reacting against class and racial jargon - were ignored by critics, since Silkin himself, whose defence of Rosenberg celebrates social change in a society composed of the working class and émigrés,⁸ was consequently criticised as "difficult to read" and having "little more than left-wing prejudice".⁹

It was taken for granted that Rosenberg's poetry was dominated by Jewish allusions; hence the description of Rosenberg as a 'Jewish poet' "has been loosely applied, based on the slight knowledge of his parentage and background and the themes (in many instances only the titles) of some of his poems."¹⁰ Arguing that "there is no doubt that Rosenberg was aware of the unrest and resentment in the East End," Davies suggested that the Jewishness of Rosenberg was an expression of a "contemporary mood through the images and themes he chose;"¹¹ a mood which involves such nineteenth century Jewish developments and thought as Zionism, Freudianism and Marxism.

Richard Anderson has argued for the influence of both Nietzsche and Freud on Rosenberg's *Moses*, claiming Rosenberg's character of Moses shows affinities with Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. Though aware that this source of influence "was not published in England until 1939," and also asserting the lack of any hard

⁷ Charles Eglington, "Isaac Rosenberg", *Jewish Affairs*, III, (May, 1948), p. 18.

⁸ Silkin, "The War, the Class and the Jews", *Stand*, IV (1960), p. 36.

⁹ Dominic Hibberd (ed.), *Poetry of the First World War*, (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 19; see also George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the First World War* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 151; 152.

¹⁰ Davies., pp. 12; 15.

evidence that Freud, on the other hand, might have read Rosenberg,¹² he nevertheless asserted that this reflects Rosenberg's "consistent and credible" place "in terms of early twentieth-century psychology, of the domineering type."¹³ In fact the affinity between Rosenberg's and Freud's Moses is one single aspect of a larger parallel between the two, and which includes the idea of the unconscious, the psychology of creative writing, memory and hence anticipates V. M. R. Tallett's claim that Rosenberg's "understanding of the unconscious and collective conscious," echo "Jungian ideas."¹⁴

As for Nietzsche's influence, this had, in fact, been explained earlier, by Patrick Bridgwater in *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1972).¹⁵ Anderson, without citing Bridgwater, affirmed that Nietzsche had "a demonstrable influence on Rosenberg's concept of his strong men," and that Rosenberg's concept of power borrows from Nietzsche's notion of 'Übermensch' as set out in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the difference between artists is held in terms of two categories: Apollonian and Dionysian. Rosenberg's Moses is considered Dionysian "for he is a rebel whose aim is to bring new life to the people, a variant on the Promethean legend;" while "Moses's personal role in his projected revolt is Apollonian rather than Dionysian."¹⁶

Nonetheless, the concatenation of Dionysus and Apollo, points also to Orpheus, who can also be traced in Anderson's discussion of a "remark on the power that music has to harmonise the unevenness of life," in Rosenberg's *The Unicorn*.¹⁷ Anderson drew on Nietzsche's account of the connection between the Semitic myth

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 15; 19.

¹² Richard Anderson, "Isaac Rosenberg - A critical Study of his Plays and Poems", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of Leicester, 1975, pp. 312-26; see p. 322

¹³ Ibid., p. 326.

¹⁴ V. M. R. Tallett, "Visionary and Revolutionary Impulses in the Works of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, Univ. of Leeds, 1991, p 1.

¹⁵ See pp. 127ff.

¹⁶ Anderson, pp. 312; 314.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 318-9.

of the Fall and the Aryan myth of Prometheus; that is, the identification in the former of the cause of the Fall to “pre-eminently feminine passions”, which is linked to the association in the latter with the “Greek legend of Pandora,”¹⁸ both connecting the misery of man to the female, an issue highlighted in the myth of Orpheus. So the myth of Orpheus may help account for the controversial interpretations of Rosenberg’s idea of femininity.

Silkin misunderstood Rosenberg’s idea of feminine power, considering him to be rebelling against the Jewish God of the Old Testament, while stating that the “female God is superior to the male.”¹⁹ ‘She’ could cheat the male god who is “usurpable”, and “the pain inflicted... by a Goddess... becomes a necessary suffering.”²⁰ While attacking the Jewish God as a helpless authoritative patriarchal figure, Rosenberg’s revolt against the female, Christian God - it will be argued - becomes harsher, associating Christianity with hypocrisy; while femininity implicates sentimentality rather than destruction, since it appears to be wearing a “pleasurable disguise”.²¹

Tallett related Rosenberg’s feminine principle to the dominance of women in his own life; home “was synonymous with his mother, Hacha” who “became an unfailing source of help and encouragement” to him; her interest in embroidery was considered an artistic affinity with her son’s art and poetry.²² His two eldest sisters’ support and encouragement, and the three Jewish women, Mrs. Herbert Cohen, Mrs. E. D. Lowy, and Mrs. Lily Delissa Joseph, who paid his fees at the Slade School of Art, Tallett argued, strengthened his idea of female power, as did women in Jewish history and legends such as Lilith whose power (like Salome, Delilah, and Vashti) was “enforced by male weakness.” Consequently, the image of the ‘female god’ is considered a replacement for the traditional God, who lacks the soul, the mind, and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 314.

¹⁹ This is part of Silkin’s analysis of Rosenberg’s “The Female God” in his “*Out of Battle*”, p. 292.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 292; 291.

²¹ Ibid., p. 293.

²² Tallett, pp. 20-1.

the imagination while the new feminine substitute represents the archetypal Great Mother as a symbol of protection and 'haven'.²³ Paradoxically, Tallett asserted an "underlying idea of threat . . . in the 'Female God'," relating it to the figure of the Great Mother who is "Great Mother, Good Mother, and Terrible Mother," hence repeating Silkin's misunderstanding of Rosenberg's idea of femininity.²⁴ Rosenberg attacked both the 'masculine' God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament who is rather feminine, an attack manifested in Rosenberg's title of the poem as "The Female God" rather than simply a 'goddess'.

Earlier studies also generalised with regards to Rosenberg's essential utterance. D. W. Harding was the first to recognise Rosenberg's 'unusual' use of language, a matter which up till today remains in need of more critical attention, considering Rosenberg's writing an act of "selecting words to express ideas," an ambiguous cliché which Harding explained saying:

The result is that he seems to leave every idea partly embedded in the undifferentiated mass of ideas from which it has emerged... his rapid skimming from one metaphor to another, each of which contributes something of its implication -one can't be sure how much- before the next appears.²⁵

The movement of images is essentially influenced by Rosenberg's other talent: painting; a matter left untackled in passing statements such as Bernard Bergonzi's claim that "undoubtedly the fact that he was also a painter influenced Rosenberg's development as a poet,"²⁶ and Fred Crawford's proposition that "Rosenberg's approach to poetry paralleled his growing understanding of painting."²⁷

Philip Hobsbaum claimed that Rosenberg's "technical innovations cannot be so readily discussed in terms of a past norm... [they] are wholly unlike anything

²³ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁵ D. W. Harding, "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", *Scrutiny*, III, No. 4 (March, 1935), p. pp. 365; 366.

²⁶ Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War*, (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1965), p. 113.

²⁷ Fred Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War*, (London: Associate Univ. Press, 1988), p. 191.

produced by the traditional Georgians,” considering Rosenberg neither a traditional nor a modernist poet.²⁸ Nevertheless, Paul Fussell traced the exploitation of pastoral themes and symbols in the English poetry of the Great War, finding Rosenberg’s “Break of Day in the Trenches” “a subtle exploitation of the conventions of English pastoral poetry, especially pastoral elegy.”²⁹ Fussell’s interest in the poet’s pastoral concerns appears within the context of the war; it could have been far more significant, had it been applied to Rosenberg’s pre-war poetry.

Jason F. Sommer also alleged that Rosenberg’s pastoral “was traditional”, identifying with “an Edenic Golden Age.”³⁰ Arguing against Fussell’s association of Rosenberg’s poems with the English pastoral tradition, Sommer asserted that it is “rather to be [seen] principally in his Jewish heritage.”³¹ This thesis will argue that although some of the sources of Rosenberg’s ‘pastoral’ are Biblical and traditionally Jewish, it also borrows equally from his readings, in English and Hebrew; his own working-class context; and his sympathy for the pre-Raphaelites. Hence it is a complicated mixture of traditions and sources, fused together by Rosenberg’s anxious talent, challenging and revising his precursors and father figures.

Perhaps part of the difficulty is that, unlike Owen, for example, Rosenberg was more than a mere ‘poet’; he was simultaneously a Jew of Lithuanian extraction, a Whitechapel lad, and Slade educated painter, all of which placed him beyond the margins of his own definition of the poet: “We ask in a poet a vigorous intellect, a searching varied power that is itself, and an independent nature.” (*CW*, 288). Rather than simply quoting phrases and words, poets, he felt, should sacrifice themselves, for only by approaching oblivion, might a given work achieve a place in the continuum of poetic thought: “we are always near a brink of some impalpable idea,

²⁸ Philip Hobsbaum, “The Road not Taken” in Hibberd (ed.), p. 105.

²⁹ Paul Fussell, “Roses and Poppies” in Hibberd (ed.), pp. 121-2; originally this is an extract from *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 243-54.

³⁰ Jason F. Sommer, “Lamp In His Blood: Some Jewish Motifs In The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg”, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Saint Louis Univ. 1985, p. 138.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

some indefinite rumour of endlessness". (CW, 289) Such a pronouncement perhaps reveals Rosenberg's emphasis on the poet's need to suppress and hide traces of tradition in his work; the necessity of having a sense of anxiety against the past while maintaining the poet's individual talent.

He also thought of the past in collective terms, rather than specifying a certain precursor, both tendencies bringing him near to Harold Bloom who celebrated "the failed enterprise of seeking to 'understand' any single poem as an entity in itself" and asked critics to "to read any poem as its poet's deliberate misinterpretation, *as a poet*, of a precursor poem or of poetry in general."³² Bloom stated:

Poetic influence... is necessarily the study of the life-cycle of the poet-as-poet... to examine simultaneously the relations between poets as cases akin to what Freud called the family romance, and as chapters in the history of modern revisionism.³³

Therefore, the existence of a precursor poet or father text becomes necessary for the production of poetry. The poet's fear of death, of coming too late, necessitates that every poem encompasses some fears originating in a competing anterior imagination. Hence, every poem constitutes in itself an account of the relation between itself and a precursor, and therefore Bloom proposed that "[a] theory of poetry must belong *to* poetry, must *be* poetry."³⁴ In claiming this, he undermined the study of 'echo'; and, working beyond mere lexical recurrence, he stretched the boundaries of 'allusion' to its utmost width and breadth, therefore making the critic's task rather more complicated. It is a specially challenging task in the case of Rosenberg, who said "I've got a particularly bad memory, I seldom remember the words of any poem I read; but the tone of the poem, the leading idea, nearly always fix their impression." (CW, 184). His relation to his past can be seen in terms of echoes and lexical recurrences as well as allusive levels of ideas and images.

³² Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973) p. 43.

³³ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

³⁴ Bloom, *Kabbalah And Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 109.

Rosenberg's "Lines Written in an Album: To J. L. [Joseph Leftwich]" provides a good demonstration of this, as the poem becomes a zone of negotiation between the living and the dead:

Thus, hidden in these pages
My thoughts shall silent lie
Till gentle fingers find them,
When idly bent to pry.
I see them fondly linger,
And quicken with their breath
The music of the singer,
Whose silence was its death.

(Lines 25-32)

Aimee Wiest has interpreted these lines as an expression of Rosenberg's "admiration for Leftwich", one of his closest friends; they are, in fact, rather more than that.³⁵ The poet confesses that his poems are tombs in which his 'thoughts' are hidden 'silent' beyond the superficial senses of the words. These thoughts can be uncovered by 'gentle fingers', a reference to readers following the lines, and reanimating with their 'breath' the dead voice of the 'singer / Whose silence was its death'. But 'hidden' within this depiction of a resurrected voice is an act of recreation, since the association between 'death' and 'breath' in the rhyme, or in terms of the poet's music, poetry and identity, is derived from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of a number of major and minor nineteenth century poets who turn up in the very textures of Rosenberg's verse.

Rosenberg was fascinated by Rossetti. In 1912 he wrote to Miss Lowy of the "Pre-Raphaelite Show" which hung at the Tate Gallery, from December 1911 to March 1912: "I think that the Rossetti drawings would be a revelation to you." (*CW*, 186). (*CW*, 209). In a letter to Miss Seaton, in 1915, Rosenberg asserted: "Rossetti is my ideal." (*CW*, 277). The veneration emerges in another letter also in 1915, to Schiff, but this time it is slightly compromised: "What people call technique is a very real thing, it corresponds to construction and command of form in painting. Rossetti was a supreme master of it in poetry, and had no command of whatever in painting."

³⁵ Aimee Jeanne Wiest, "The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland College Park. 1984, p. 34.

(*CW*, 216). Perhaps in consequence, he told Miss Seaton: “Rossetti never published anything that wasn’t good.” (*CW* 277).

Claiming that “our age of poetry” has changed its principles and the consequent need for a new type of poetry, Rosenberg said:

Rossetti I think is the keynote of the command... in ‘The Monochord’... all poignancy- a richness and variety, a purity of imagination - a truth, far beyond wit, or thought... There are poets... whose very vigour and energy finds its outlet in a perverse and insistent plucking at the wings of death... (*CW*, 301)

Rossetti’s verse manifested great energy, but only in the direction of the tomb. In consequence, the feathers which Rossetti plucked from the ‘wings of death’ Rosenberg grasped and stuck into his own poem, whose rhymed association of ‘death’ and ‘breath’ seems to be derived from “The Monochord”: “Holds my *breath* quailing on the bitter bound?/ Nay, is it Life or *Death*, thus thunder-crown’d”. [My emphasis] Rosenberg would have also remembered the same rhyme featuring in “Death-in-Love”, where the disembodied voice says “Behold, there is no breath:/ I and this Love are one, and I am death”; and, once again in Rossetti’s sonnet “Lost Days”:

I do not see them here; but after death.
God knows I know the faces I shall see,
Each one a murder’d self, with low last breath.

(Lines 9-11)

Not only is there an echo in Rosenberg’s lines in the rhyme of ‘death’ and ‘breath’, but also in the reappearance of Rossetti’s verbs ‘lie’ (“Lost Days”, line 3) and ‘see’ (“Lost Days”, lines 2; 9). But, more important than these scattered echoes of and allusions to Rossetti is the sense that Rosenberg’s poem indirectly sets out a theory, in poetry, of the relation between the living and dead, and also between readers and poets. Like the dead men dumped, Rosenberg’s thoughts lie silent until they are excavated by the reader, who having watched the ‘half-used life’ pass by, breathes new life into the ‘doomed mouth’.

Chapter One

The Partial Fate: Rosenberg and Zionism

Isaac Rosenberg, reviewing the works of John Henry Amschewitz and Henry Osipov at the Baillie Galleries in 1912, commented on these artists' lack of Jewish identity:

...[w]ithout knowing the names of the artists, the children of whose brain we are dealing with here, one would not suspect here for a moment the Jewish parentage of this remarkable progeny.

Whether this is something to be deplored or not is beside the question here, as it is the inevitable result of ages of assimilation and its blame (if a defect) is to be placed on the causes that made us a race, and unmade us as a nation. Yet though these causes have deprived us of any exclusive atmosphere such as our literature possesses... [t]he travail and sorrow of centuries have given life a more poignant and intense interpretation, while the strength of the desire of ages has fashioned an ideal which colours all our expression of existence. (*CW*, 286-7)

That parenthesis, '(if a defect)', is tactful enough, but cannot conceal Rosenberg's discomfort with the perceived lack of Jewish exclusivity, or his belief that a solution may lie in recreating, however roughly, some form of ideal cultural identity lost in the 'ages of assimilation'. In particular, the careful distinction between the making of 'race' and the unmaking of 'nation' is telling; the former seems to exist at the expense of the latter.

Recent studies have sought to define 'nation' as a group of people who feel themselves bound up by common ties of language, history, culture and religion; who have a sense of themselves.¹ James G. Kellas argued that history, culture and common ancestry are the major components of nationhood, while territory and religion are less important, because they make 'nation' less inclusive, as they

¹ On the topic of nation, see - James Grant Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, (London: Macmillan Education, 1991); Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1965); Elie Kodourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960), 2nd ed., 1985; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2nd ed.; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), repr. 1990; Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in

determine particular religion and land claims to be essential in including certain people in the defined nation.² Elie Kedourie rejected any distinction between racial and linguistic definitions of 'nation', saying that, in France, the Semite's inability to understand or handle the native language properly became a means of excluding him from the 'French nation'; hence "racial classifications were linguistic ones", language placing as severe a qualification on the concept of nation as does race.³ E. J. Hobsbawm emphasised that the ethnic-linguistic criterion was a major factor in the definition of nationhood and asserted, the idea of nationalism, especially as put into practice between 1880-1914, abandoned the preceding so-called "Liberal era" of Mazzini's call of "Every nation a state", after which "any body of people considering themselves a 'nation' claimed the right to self-determination which, in the last analysis, meant the right to a separate sovereign independent state for their territory."⁴ For Ernest Gellner, nationalism, as a theory of political legitimacy, necessitates that ethnic boundaries do not "separate the power-holders from the rest."⁵ In other words, the question of nationhood would incorporate serious problems if such a defining element as race became part of the adopted idea of 'nation'.

Race, with its associated concepts of common origin and descent, ancestry, kinship and blood, is an exclusive version of nation, and one which for Rosenberg is problematic and negative, since he knew that those who invoke race as a criterion for cultural comparison necessarily believe in the superiority of their race and the inferiority of the others'. Considering the Jews simply as a 'race' would be to render them inferior as a 'nation' ("made us a race and unmade us as a nation"); to render them liable to persecution. As the British treated them as a racial minority, the Jews were excluded from the 'nation' and denied cultural interaction. Tellingly, Rosenberg's comment - so nicely balanced between neutrality and negation - demonstrates his sense that the criterion of race was

Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 25-73.

² Kellas, pp. 2-3.

³ Kedourie, pp. 71-2.

⁴ Hobsbawm, pp. 1-2; 101; 102.

imposed on rather than chosen by the Jews. In Rosenberg's sense, a 'nation' on the land of which other races live incorporates racial distinction in terms of whose blood is superior and thus should rule the 'other'. Thus, treating the Jews as a race meant denying them their group solidarity ('unmade us as a nation'), and even rejecting their equal membership in the British national identity. The idea of 'the British nation' to which Rosenberg reacts becomes a matter of the 'English race'. This is basically what Kohn called "Biological Nationalism" which dominated the later years of the nineteenth century and was influenced by "the rapidly growing prestige of the biological sciences... together with the Darwinian 'struggle for survival'".⁶

Therefore, Jewish culture - in particular art and literature - was not permitted to become a component of British culture, nor to be recognised as a different cultural product, because racial superiority needed to diminish the 'other race'. To avoid this racist censorship, Rosenberg felt that if the Jewish artist was to produce and be recognised within the English nation, then he had to suppress his identity. But Ospovat and Amschewitz, Rosenberg argues, maintained a Jewish identity in their works at a time when the British, by treating Jews as a race rather than a nation, effectively 'deprived' them of any exclusive atmosphere such as "our literature possesses." When race is a defining component of nation, "minorities", Charles Taylor argues, become "suppressed cultures" and are "forced to take an alien form."⁷ In other words, in multiracial and, by that token, multicultural communities, considering the 'other race' a group by itself, an act which acknowledges that 'other race's' existence, incorporates a sense of recognition. However, because this kind of recognition is accompanied with exclusion from the powerful 'nation' which hosts the 'other race', the acknowledgement is problematic, because recognition turns out as alienation, as opposed to a general concept of 'one nation one state'. However, alienation seems at odds with the fact that British society, as, in fact, part of the larger Western European society, adopted the idea of the 'Emancipation', which meant assimilating, rather than isolating, the

⁵ Gellner, p. 1.

⁶ Kohn, p. 73.

⁷ Taylor, p. 43.

Jews in British or European society. Nonetheless, Rosenberg stressed that it was the assimilation that caused the Jews' alienation. His judgement was based on first-hand experience of the application and failure of the assimilation, against which Zionism reacted before and during his life.

Looking at George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* might shed light on these emerging attitudes towards the Jewish question at the late nineteenth century. First, it must be stated that there is in the novel heavy emphasis on the connection between this literary work and history: Eliot writes: "I like to mark the time, and connect the course of individual lives with a historic stream," stating later that "It is hardly to be called a story.... It is a bit of history brought near us with a strong telescope."⁸ But a history of what? The Jew and the woman who both required "that the good of life [be] distributed with wonderful equality," the history of Deronda, the Jew, who "felt himself in no sense free."⁹ Deronda spoke 'wisely' "about men who were born out of wedlock and were held misfortunate in consequence" and who needed "to work themselves up to an equal standing with their legally born brothers."¹⁰ 'Wedlock' is perhaps the burden of exile, and 'legally born' possibly that of belonging to the British nation and race. Out of such a context emerges the following statement on the Jewish question:

Deronda could not escape (who can?) knowing ugly stories of Jewish characteristics and occupations; and though one of his favourite protests was against the severance of past and present history, he was like others who shared his protest, in never having cared to reach any more special conclusions about actual Jews than that they retained the virtues and vices of a long-oppressed race.¹¹

That parenthesis, cordoning off the question so neatly, quietly suggests a common link between races, that even the 'ugly stories' could not destroy. This sentiment parallels Rosenberg's idea of the Jewish attitude being the result of the assimilation that does not fulfil the actual needs of the Jews, and rather suppresses them. The

⁸ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1878), repr. 1896, pp. 65; 64; 147.

⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 152.

Jews' needs are known to the Jews, and should not therefore be decided by Western culture, nor even by Jews who did not suffer the burden of their race, as in the case of Deronda, whose mother tells him: "you are glad to have been born a Jew. You say so. That is because you have not been brought up as a Jew. That separateness seems sweet to you because I saved you from it."¹²

The suppression of women is linked to that of the Jew. Gwendolen "was the princess in exile."¹³ At the end of the story she writes to Deronda: "I have remembered your words - that may I live to be one of the best women, who make others glad that they were born."¹⁴ While the story begins with a complaint against a culture of "make-believe", the representative feminist Gwendolen now, through her understanding of the Jewish question, develops her own belief. She is freed from the constraints of her culture, a culture in which the woman is, like the Jew, "vulgar" as she assumes a role that is considered a masculine attribute, and hence she should be 'tamed'. This culture "glanced over the girl-tragedies that are going on in the world, hidden, unheeded."¹⁵ The Jew and the woman come together in Mirah, the Jewess of whom Lady Mallinger thought in terms of the "Society for the conversion of the Jews."¹⁶

Nonetheless, these statements emerge in a novel that links not only the writing of literature and history but also literature and politics. It attempts to place its major feminist and Jewish questions in a "universal history" that overcomes barriers of class, race and gender and hence provides "a passport in life".¹⁷ This parallels the Zionist attitude of associating Jewish endeavours for a national identity with universal voices of liberty. However, such writers pose as politicians, and

¹² Ibid., p. 473.

¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 611.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 131; 133.

Eliot's *Deronda* is aware of this: "you might... be a writer - take up politics."¹⁸
Literature and art are not socially less influential than politics:

A creative artist is no more a mere musician than a great statesman is a mere politician... We help to make the nations and make the age as much as any other public men. We count ourselves on level branches with legislators. And a man who speaks effectively through music is compelled to something more difficult than parliamentary eloquence.¹⁹

Fiction goes beyond its fictional status when it deals with history and politics: "if there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence of all the nations.... if a literature is called rich in the possession of a few classic tragedies, what shall we say of a National tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors are also the heroes."²⁰ Rosenberg's observation of the Jewishness of Amschewitz and Ospovat carries the same message, asserting that Jewish literature is rooted in Jewish 'tragedy'; basically of their exile and struggle to achieve equality and recognition.

Isaac Rosenberg was born on 25th November 1890 in Bristol and later, in 1897, his family moved to the East End where he "aspired to become a representative poet of his own nation."²¹ His family arrived in Leeds from Russia, then moving to Bristol, finally settling in the Whitechapel. Unlike the Anglo-Jewish community, the Jewish immigrants "with a strange religion and a strange tongue (Yiddish...), were foreign enough."²² They were more orthodox than the already established English Jews and, unable to afford joining an established Synagogue, they set up small places of worship known as 'Chevra'. Here they gathered and discussed both religious and social issues and thus established their own community within English society, an act which, though offering them a

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 180.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 388.

²¹ Isaac Rosenberg, *Poems By Isaac Rosenberg*, ed., Gordon Bottomley (London: William Heinmann, 1922), p.9.

²² Jean Liddiard, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half-Used Life* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), p. 17.

certain sense of identity, isolated them and, especially for the young, widened the gap between them and their surroundings:

For these were Jewish in so extravagantly exotic a fashion; far stricter and narrower in their religious observance, they regarded the Anglicised Jews as scarcely Jews at all. The immigrant also disturbed the English Jew with his foreignness... His language, in the early days his earlocks, bushy black beard, black hat and skull cap, seemed so distinctive in a humdrum English setting.²³

Rosenberg's family was committed to the orthodox tradition. Not only was his father an orthodox Jew, but he was also an avid reader of contemporary Hebrew literature; and experimented with creative writing, publishing a number of poems in Jewish journals in Russia before he emigrated.²⁴ Rosenberg stood before 'a solid background of Hebrew and Jewish culture', and moreover, he understood Yiddish, and spoke it at home.²⁵

These religious and cultural differences were also strengthened by a related economic factor. Immigrant Jews were in need of work, but because of their different work experience and demands, they had limited job opportunities:

The immigrant Jew found it more important to work among familiar habits and customs, where there would be no problem about taking the Jewish Saturday as a holiday instead of the Christian Sunday and where there was still a personal, informal relationship between the employer and employed. Effectively, if not legally, the immigrant Jew put himself back into a ghetto, physically and mentally.²⁶

Lady Magnus described the circumstances of the Jews early in the nineteenth-century:

trade was fettered by restrictions, professions were handicapped, university education was barred, and any municipal or State service was impossible to the Jews.²⁷

²³ Ibid., p.18.

²⁴ E. O. G. Davies, "Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Nottingham, 1957, p. 12.

²⁵ Ibid., p.17.

²⁶ Liddiard, p. 18.

²⁷ Lady Magnus, *Outlines of The Jewish History* (London: Mitchell, 1958), p. 189.

Maurice Freedman also asserted that not only did the religious background - in the sense of being Jews in a Christian society - contributed to the isolation of the Jewish community but also that the economic margins strengthened such alienation.²⁸

For Rosenberg, the economic factor was always an obstacle that isolated him socially and restricted his freedom to practice his writing and art. His family suffered from the father's meagre income. In 47 Cable Street, Stepney, the family lived in a one-room flat. As a young man, Rosenberg could not get his own room in which he might, for example, practise the painting which meant so much to him in his childhood. Furthermore, painting also required money and equipment, but his family could not even support his school education after his fourteenth year. He was always searching for a job but the chronic lung infection was an obstacle; Jean Liddiard noted: "his small physique and frail air were against him; physical labour... as a last resort, was not open to Rosenberg."²⁹ "[H]e was unable to find work; this had brought on a bout of inertia and a bitter sense of being a burden to his family."³⁰ Then he was apprenticed to an art shop.

Nonetheless, during the nineteenth century, Europe witnessed a rise of a kind of liberalism, part of which called for Jewish equality.³¹ The solution was centred around the so-called 'Emancipation', which meant overcoming the barriers of the ghetto, achieving equal rights and liberation by means of admission to the European society. However, the emancipation failed, and Jews were frustrated. First, anti-Semitism continued:

²⁸ Maurice Freedman, "Jews in the Society of Britain" in *A Minority in Britain: Social Studies of the Anglo Jewish Community*, ed. Maurice Freedman (London: Valentine, Mitchell & Co. Ltd., 1955), p. 202. See also pp. 212-22.

²⁹ Liddiard, p.178.

³⁰ Ibid., p.143.

³¹ See for example: Harold Fisch, *The Zionist Revolution: A New Perspective* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978); Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*, translated by D. S. Blondheim (New York, 1906); Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1927); Magnus.

True, Jews had attained, or were on their way to attaining, equal rights as citizens, but subtler discrimination continued.³²

Second, the emancipated Jews feared that they might lose their Jewish identity. As Freedman puts it:

The Jewish problem is often posed as one of assimilation but when we look closely at this term we see that it does little more than restate the problem without sharpening it.³³

As Walter Laqueur puts it: "Zionism has always regarded assimilation as its main enemy."³⁴ Rosenberg was aware of this fact, as his comment on Amschewitz and Ospovat shows.

Most Zionist thinkers who, after the failure of the emancipation, tried to find a substitute, promoted this idea. Leo Pinsker, an Eastern European Jewish writer, introduced the second stage of what he called 'auto-emancipation'; that is "self-emancipation as a group, admission to the family of nations on equal footing with other national groups."³⁵ His aim, Harold Fisch argues,

was thus not essentially different from that of the enlightened Jews of the West... It was merely that he transposed the idea to the national level. By becoming a nation like other nations Jews would become normal... the problem of peculiarity... of discrimination levelled at Jews as Jews, would then disappear.³⁶

Later, Theodor Herzl arrived at similar conclusions and Zionism turned out to be the solution:

emancipation, in the sense of the grant of civil rights, was not enough. There had to be a further decisive phase - national liberation. Only when Jews achieved a national status comparable with that of other peoples would the scandal of otherness be removed.³⁷

³² Fisch, p.2.

³³ Freedman, p. 202.

³⁴ Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 591.

³⁵ Fisch, p. 2. Fisch here paraphrases Pinsker's argument which is originally presented in the latter's *Auto-Emancipation*, trans. D. S. Blondheim (New York, 1906), p. 12.

³⁶ Fisch, p.2.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

In 1905 Rosenberg wrote his first known poem "Ode to David's Harp", a year after he left school and became an apprentice engraver. The poem, Avner Azriel Fellner argues, is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition, according to which David's harp was lost when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC and will remain missing till the Second Coming of the Messiah who would lead the Jews back to their homeland.³⁸ Rosenberg invites his people to:

Awake! ye joyful strains, awake!
In silence sleep no more;
Disperse the gloom that ever lies
O'er Judah's barren shore.

(Lines: 1-4)

Indeed, this old-fashioned, and conventional invitation springs from the conditions of the immigrant Jews who lived in Britain, or in the larger context of Europe, in the era of post-assimilation. Rosenberg was born long after calls for the equalisation of the British (European) Jewry started, and lived the consequences of the assimilation. Consequently, his poem's call for an active Jewish national identity was rather beside the point. It was from this relatively distant point that his contribution towards Zionism began.

The question of national identity, which is the essence of the "Zionism of Pinsker, Herzl and [Max] Nordau", became the basis for later apostles of modern Zionism such as Moses Hess, Ahad Ha'am and Rabbi A. I. Kook all of whom linked it with the so called 'Return to Zion'.³⁹ At this point, Zionism started to acquire a deeper meaning which the emancipation could not provide, 'identity':

In an era in which Jewish identity was threatened on all sides, it would provide a means of deepening and strengthening that identity. Instead of the languages of the non-Jewish environment, the Hebrew language would become the language of Jews, and through that language the Jewish soul would be redeemed. Zionism would then become an instrument not primarily for

³⁸ Avner Azriel Fellner, "The Life and Work of Isaac Rosenberg", unpublished masters thesis, George Washington Univ., 1963, p. 6.

³⁹ Fisch, p.4.

normalising the Jewish conditions, but for emphasising the specific inwardness of Jewish existence *in spite of* the equalising process of the new liberalism.⁴⁰

The emancipation threatened the Jewish identity while Zionism proved to be its saviour. While 'emancipation' meant eliminating the 'difference' which burdened the Jew's life, there was still a need for this difference but without any pejorative sense; that is, to get rid of its burden. The emancipation meant having the Jew similarly treated like the English (European) when it should have meant 'similarly differentiated'. Jews were in need of 'similar difference' and 'positive distinction', an ambition addressed in the question of statehood and national identity. Jewish identity in the Gentile world becomes a matter of difference. Therefore Zionism was accompanied by practical activities to avoid the erosion of assimilation: the establishment of voluntary ghettos and religious reforms.⁴¹

Zionism represented the Jewish aspiration to return to Zion, the land of Israel where the Jewish race would become a nation and achieve a national state. Herzl advocated the establishment of a Jewish state as the only solution to the Jewish question in his book *The Jewish State* (1896), and in 1897 he established the World Zionist Organisation. In August of the same year he convoked the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, which signalled the birth of political Zionism. Herzl devoted his life to support the success of the movement by organising such Zionist institutions as The Jewish Colonial Trust (1898) and The Jewish National Fund (1901) in order to achieve an independent Jewish Palestine. At this stage, Zionism worked in the light of a prophetic Judaic myth of the ultimate return to Jerusalem and establishment of the Jewish state there.

Rosenberg was aware of such developments around him. In 1906, he wrote his second extant poem "Zion" and introduced his beloved: "She stood - a hill-ensceptred Queen,/ The glory streaming from her." However, in the last stanza, she appears part of an unfulfilled dream:

Where is that light - that citadel?

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.5.

That robe with woof of glory?
 She lost her virtue and she fell,
 And only left her story.

Indeed, the dream here verges on nightmare, with the suggestion of surrender and loss of 'virtue', a submission which leaves behind only a half-believed narrative of abandonment; the woof has been broken. The implication of 'citadel' reflects a similar sense of insecurity; the persona's need for a safe shelter entails his feelings of threat. Indeed, the word may allude to the first book of the Maccabees where it is heavily used: "The city of David was turned into a citadel" (1: 33), suggesting a needed haven. However, it also appears within a context of submission, slavery and lack of freedom ("and ordered the hostages in the citadel to be handed over to him" (10: 6); "The men in the citadel in Jerusalem were prevented from going in and out." (10: 50)) and elsewhere it is also associated with a rebellion: "The Judas detailed the troops to engage the garrison of the citadel/ The war under Judas and Jonathan while he cleansed." (4: 41). The fact that Zion "fell, / And only left her story" raises the question of where has its people gone, and might be a call for the lost population of Zion to rise and show themselves; to 'awake, remember, and disperse', as in "Ode to David's Harp". Metaphors of power, which V. Tallett found in the introductory images of standing and 'hill', are negated by the image of falling at the end.⁴² Now Zion's power is left to the story, again emphasising memory, where the woof becomes the thread of the Jewish narrative which Rosenberg remembers.⁴³

Rosenberg carried these implications further in "Dawn Behind Night" written in 1909. He records the depressed life of the Jewish people:

Lips! bold, frenzied utterance, shape to the thoughts that are prompted by hate
 Of the red streaming burden of wrong we have borne and still bear;
 That wealth with its soul-crushing scourges placed into its hands by fate,
 Hath made the cement of its towers, grim-girdled by our despair.

(Lines: 1-4)

⁴² V. M. R. Tallett, "Visionary and Revolutionary Impulses in the Works of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Leeds, 1991, p. 37.

⁴³ The phrase 'woof of glory' appears in a poem called "Genius" (line 24), by Thomas Aird (1802-76, Scottish poet, educated at Edinburgh University, where he met Thomas Carlyle and maintained his friendship until Aird's death); however Rosenberg does not mention reading him.

The exclaimed apostrophe to the mouth is strangely obsessive, and narrows the focus of his reaction to the treatment they have received at the hands of those who would scapegoat the Jews. The political point is simple enough; the reaction to the pogroms, the 'soul-crushing scourges', can only be rhetorical, in the first instance, since, as a consequence of persecution, his Jewish identity is submerged in "the life or death they dole us from the rags and bones of their store," which, Tallett suggested, may allude to the rag-and-bone trade which many Jews were compelled to undertake.⁴⁴ However, Rosenberg remains optimistic:

Lies the glimpse of a heaven behind it, for the ship hath left the shore,
That will find us and free us and take us where its portals are opened wide.
(Lines: 15-6)

But such hope may only be synonymous with desperation. In "Ode To David's Harp", Rosenberg addresses the Jew in the second person imperative, "Awake"; and in "Zion", in the third person. However, in both cases, he and his Jewish counterpart are two separate identities. Realising that, as a Jewish writer, his task was to convince his race of the validity of the 'Return to Zion', Rosenberg also knew that social change could only be inaugurated if the Jews were properly motivated to achieve their goal, and the imperative tone of "Awake" shows his determination to galvanise his peers first using his own voice. However, In "Dawn Behind Night" the scattered Jewish identities have become one first personal identity; 'our' and 'us', against 'they', the oppressors.

Rosenberg was "prepossessed with change."⁴⁵ His treatment of such a theme is based on rejecting a present, painfully associated with sorrow and rejection: "Life holds the glass but gives us tears for wine." ("To J.[ohn] H.[enry] Amschewitz"). The pattern of terminal sibilance in verb and noun, so nearly regular, gives a sense of monotony, and hence intensifies the dominance of the present tense which is a representative characteristic of Rosenberg's personae, one of whom complains of having always lived in misery of the conditional: "The free

⁴⁴ Tallett, p. 58.

⁴⁵ Joseph Cohen, *Journey to The Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1975), p. 32.

fair life that has never been mine, the glory that might have been.” (“Tess”). Consequently, when sorrow is the only reality, it is sought as a kind of release:

O! joy of mine, O! longed for stranger,
How would I greet you if you came!
In the world's joys I've been a ranger,
In my world sorrow is their name.

“O! In A World of Men and Women” (lines 9-12)

The certainty of the rhymes here cannot mask a bigger strain. Given the desire for a ‘stranger’, the typical rhyme, ‘danger’, is impossible; in its place, ‘ranger’ sounds oddly fantastic, far-fetched from the world of parks and gardens into the zone of the ghetto.

Therefore, blaming God in “Love To Be”, his life is merely suffering caused by the score: “I, weighted from my toil, and sore distress/ In body and soul, the scourge of partial fate.” (Lines: 5-6). The phrase ‘partial fate’ is familiar from much Victorian poetry (cf. Robert Browning’s “Fifine at the Fair XXIV”: “doomed on such partial fate” (line 271); but now it is a cliché which Rosenberg claims for his own race. The adjective ‘partial’ is carefully chosen, poised between senses of incompleteness and prejudice, both equally valid in describing the life of a young Jew in East London.

Rosenberg’s image of the ‘cage’ strengthens his dominant feelings of being controlled and ‘led’, representing the persona’s imprisonment in ‘partial fate:

Air knows as you know that I sing in my cage of earth

...

And you only laugh as you pass me, and I weep in my cage of earth.

“The Cage” (lines 1; 12)

The speaker is in a grave situation. A related cage image recurs in “The Poet I”, where the desired heavenly joy is impeded by being caged in earth: “And caught him in a cage of earth.” However, the persona’s imprisonment is reversed: instead of being caged within, he is denied access, left outside, behind closed gates for which he has no keys, as if exiled or alienated:

As a hard burden, that it doth belate
 And make him seem a laggard at the gate
 Of long-wished night, while days ride down the west

“Love To Be” (Lines: 2-4)

The title of this poem is significant: it suggests the persona's ideal desire, and its imminent arrival. In both cases the desired existence and love are at odds with the situation of his life, his sense of imprisonment. Opposed to the movement of time, “while days ride down the west,” he seems to be simply ‘marking time’ as a soldier, moving his feet but making no progress until given the command. Such are the feelings of the Jew experiencing only a partial assimilation; isolated, alienated and denied access and admission to the British community, and uncertain of his place within his own deracinated race.

Under the control of the ‘present’ prevailing suffering, death becomes a wish; in “Dust Calleth to Dust”, a speck calls out: “O brother, dear brother/ How long must you guard that fierce temple of God?” (Lines: 5-6). That modal verb ‘Must’ represents the persona's involvement in compulsory suffering. Realising this death-in-life, he seeks life-in-death:

No lips of love glow red from out the gloom
 That life spreads darkly like a living tomb
 Around my path. Death's gift is best not worst.
 For even the honey on life's lips is curst.

“Death” (Lines: 2-5)

Once again, as in his earliest work, Rosenberg is drawing attention to the ‘doomed mouth’ as the only zone where love or life might manifest itself. ‘Living tomb’ may be a cliché from Matthew Arnold's “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse”: “What dost thou in this living tomb” (Line 72); but death is also desired when providential forgiveness and pity disappear:

God. God! if thou art pity, look on me;
 God! if thou art forgiveness, turn and see
 The dark within, the anguish on my brow!
 O! wherefore am I stricken in grief thus low?

...

If rest alone through death's gate is but won.

“What May Be What Hath Been and What is Now?” (lines 1-4; 13)

Chronology is broken; rather than the expected sequence of 'what hath been, what is now and what may be' - past, present, future - the placing of 'what is now' at the end reflects the eternal pressure of the present. Furthermore, the fact that this is a question deepens the persona's uncertainty about the future, as well as his fear that it could be as desperate as his past or his present. In short, it seems to be a question about the future of the Jews whose past and present are associated with troubled life in exile. And like death's rest, 'fair' life is associated with a gate:

Find us some gate in air
To leave our world-stained lives behind
And live a life more fair.

"O Heart, Home of High Purposes" (Lines: 10-12)

Indeed, it is not strange to find Rosenberg believing in death as a realm of life. A belief in the after-life is central in the *Talmud* where the body is presented as a clay imprisoning the soul; or as "the scabbard of the soul."⁴⁶ Rosenberg himself says in *Moses*:

The old clay is broken
For a power to soak in and knit
It all into tougher tissues

(lines: 34-7)

The title "O Heart, Home of High Purposes" suggests that the essence is the heart (soul). Therefore, 'fair life' is sought 'in air', suggesting the journey of the soul back to heaven. This belief lies behind Rosenberg's recurring image 'soul sack' (*Moses*, line: 103 and "Break of Day in the Trenches", line 24) which seems to invoke the teachings of the *Talmud* which stress the "pre-existence of souls: 'In the seventh heaven, Araboth, are stored, the spirits and souls which have still to be created'."⁴⁷ Indeed, the association between the soul and 'high purposes' in the title is deeply rooted in Rosenberg's constant emphasis on the 'spiritual' rather than the 'physical'. It is the freedom of the soul, not the body that he is looking for. The assimilation gave liberty to the individual Jew but it did not recognise his spiritual desire for identity. Other gate-images such as "the gates of morning" in "Zion"

⁴⁶ Quoted in Davies, p. 38. Originally from Sanherdin 108a.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Davies,, p. 39. Originally from Hagigah 12b.

(line 5) and the “gates of paradise” in “God Looked Clear at Me Through Her Eyes” (line 3) further project inner feelings of rituals of passage.

In depicting a depressed alienated outcast, Rosenberg was reflecting Zionist thought prevalent at the time. Analysing its accomplishment, Fisch emphasised the importance of the linguistic aspect of Zionism because “what occurred in the nineteenth century”, he argued, “was a linguistic deception.”⁴⁸ He added:

The linguistic delusion had at the time important and valuable results. It made Zionism comprehensible to a great many people whose good will and support proved vital to the success of the endeavour. More important, it also made Zionism comprehensible to a great many alienated Jews, who were unconscious of the real nature of the force to which they were responding. They were able to persuade themselves that they were doing what all other peoples were doing in their generation - returning home to seek their independence.⁴⁹

Zionism formulated a Jewish myth based around universal metaphors. Such major philosophers as Moses Hess, A. D. Gordon, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, and Martin Buber, “showed an awareness of Zionism as a revolutionary salvation myth, combining spiritual and political elements in a dynamic synthesis.”⁵⁰ This synthesis engulfs a number of “literary metaphors... with which Zionism is nourished and without which it cannot be understood.”⁵¹

‘Alienation’ is embodied in the modern Jewish exile and, thus, intensifies the “healing power of the Return.”⁵² More than a merely Jewish dimension, it is employed to reflect the “universal homelessness” of mankind just as “modern literature is haunted by images of exile and loss... there is thus a profound sense in which the exile of the Jew is a symbol for the human condition in our day.”⁵³ It is related to the Biblical exile of the children of Israel in Egypt with its significant

⁴⁸ Fisch, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.39.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.26.

⁵² Ibid., p.24.

⁵³ Ibid., p.27.

implication of the loss of identity. However, this Biblical sense does not render religious commitment, because:

The founders [of the movement] had, by and large, given up the faith of their ancestors and had adopted instead alternative ideologies, such as the Tolstoyan ethic... the Marxist dialectic or high-minded Western liberalism... The earlier gods have failed... but the need for a sustaining faith remains as strong as ever.⁵⁴

The new faith was the return to Zion and the establishment of a Jewish state, as Zionism associated the Jewish question with, more than merely religious, political and social dimensions.

The persona's alienation is represented as a kind of spiritual death. However, the association between death and gates implicates a new beginning rather than an end; by achieving death the persona enters a new realm in which the alienated outcast seeks redemption. This accounts for the maintained optimism. Rebirth is sought in death. Hence, in "A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory", the fact the "roses die" is, rather than mortality, a necessary end for a new beginning:

...and as the roses fall,
And the wine pours and spills,
She gathers in her lap and breathes on them;
And in the urn the spilled wine glows again,
Lit by her eyes divine.
And all the roses at her touch revive,
And blush and bloom again.
...
While the soul dreams and yearns,
Watching the risen faces of the hours,
And shrivelled Autumn change her face to June's

(Lines: 21-7; 40-2)

Similarly, in 'My Days' the persona believes in rebirth after death:

My days are but the tombs of buried hours;
Which tombs are hidden in the piléd years;
But from the mounds there springeth up such flowers
Whose beauty well repays its cost of tears.

(lines 1-4)

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

Such 'new life' is even more valuable and precious: "But from the dust there falleth grains of gold,/ And the dead corpse leaves what will never die."

Indeed, the imagery of alienation and rebirth seem to coincide with Zionist thought, for while Zionism manipulated the alienation to depict the exile of the Jews in Diaspora as a sign of 'universal homelessness', it also exploited rebirth metaphors to symbolise the establishment of Jewish identity and state. Moses Hess portrayed Zionism using the imagery of growth and organism.⁵⁵ This enabled him to present the Jewish people as "part of the larger organic unity of mankind" and Judaism as "a seed preserved alive through the centuries like the grains of corn found in the Egyptian tombs."⁵⁶ Thus, Hess presented Israel as a tree to be replanted in its soil and achieve rebirth. Fisch argued that the imagery of organism and growth is related to the romantic opposition to bourgeois civilised life being related to William Wordsworth's concept of 'Natural sympathy'.⁵⁷ As it implies vitality and liberation, such imagery becomes similar to the romantic preference of life in Nature rather than society. It is a romantic rejection of bourgeois city life in favour of the life of the countryside. Rosenberg's own attitude towards the city, London, is relevant:

I dislike London for the selfishness it instills into one, which is a reason of the peculiar feeling of isolation I believe most people have in London.(CW, 200-1)

In "Night and Day" he describes it as "the dun monstrous buildings", and in "Fleet Street": "The stony buildings blindly stare/ Unconscious of the crime within".

Hess concluded his *Rome and Jerusalem* with a sentimental tale as a representation of his own Zionist philosophy which is central in most later Zionist theories. It tells of a knight who, after making pilgrimage to the Holy Land, visits a friend and gives him a dried rose he brought from Jericho.

The Rabbi took the rose from his friend and watered it with his tears. And behold a miracle! It bloomed afresh and brought forth a sweet fragrance. Said

⁵⁵ Moses Hess, *Rome And Jerusalem*, ed. and trans. Meyer Waxman (New York, 1943).

⁵⁶ Fisch, p.52.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.55.

the Rabbi: 'marvel not my friend. For Israel is that dry and withered flower, and she too will again blossom like the rose when she is restored to the garden of her youth'.⁵⁸

Tellingly, in "My Days", Rosenberg's belief in rebirth is compared to a rose "Whose beauty well repays its cost of tears". The title alludes to the 'present' which is associated with sorrow and depression. The 'present' is an obstacle between desired past and future, youth and future fruitful growth: "Thou art the link 'twixt after and before". ("The Present"). The persona suffers a disintegrated life that is disseminated over time.

Rosenberg's 'root' image is also part of the whole imagery of growth. It relates man to God: "Your roots are God, the pauseless cause." ("Creation", line: 20). Nonetheless, the persona, who in "The Jew" announces himself as a descendent of Moses: "Moses, from whose loins I sprung", emphasises, in "Creation", that Judaism is the perfect root of Christianity; Moses is the root of Christ:

Moses must die to live in Christ,
The seed be buried to live to green.
Perfection must begin from worst.
...
The green plant yearns for its yellow fruit.
Perfection always is a root.

(Lines: 33-9)

The persona believes in a myth of creation based on the cycle of life in 'Nature'. Moses's death is a seed replanted in earth to live again in Christ like a tree; but this tree is approaching its death; it 'yearns for its yellow fruit,' thus, paving the way for a new perfection by becoming a seed that bears a root. Death, then, is a new beginning; it is the realm where the 'dead', suppressed Jewish identity, which is associated with perfection, achieves rebirth.

Nonetheless, roots are associated with invisibility: "Hidden as a root from air or a star from day." ("Midsummer Frost"). Tellingly, Judah in "Ode To David's Harp" is associated with silence and darkness as signs of his being forgotten or

⁵⁸ Cited in Ibid., p.52.

disregarded and with a 'barren shore', a description central in the imagery of growth, representing Judah's situation as lacking signs of rebirth. Having in mind Rosenberg's Jewish roots, this reflects on the lack of Judaic identity at a time when the assimilation recognised the identity of the flesh, but suppressed the identity of the spirit. Mingled with the persona's previous feelings and perceptions of time and place are numerous signs of an identity-crisis, as in the insistence on his being left outside waiting behind gates, or on suffering from living in darkness, sleep, and silence, which is equalled to exclusion: "Or where absence, silence is." ("Sensual"). And these are the feelings of the Jew treated as a race and unsatisfied by the assimilation which, rather than positively recognising his identity, requires him to adopt a British one.

Consequently, identity is searched for. "Through These Pale Cold Days", adopts a journey in search for identity away from the 'here and now'; the destination is Hebron:

What dark faces burn
 Out of three thousand years,
 And their wild eyes yearn,

 While underneath their brows
 Like waifs their spirits grope
 For the pools of Hebron again -
 ...
 They see with living eyes
 How long they have been dead.

(lines 2-12)

The contrast between 'death' prior to the journey, and 'living' afterwards represents the rebirth of identity. Furthermore, the contradiction between the image of burning before the journey and the pools of Hebron, a zone of fire and water, is a wish-fulfilment, a manifestation of the 'healing power of the Return', about which Zionism intended to convince the Jews.

The ultimate realisation of the theme of change comes in his play *Moses*, where Rosenberg dramatises the Jewish need for 'power' and identity. The relationship between the assimilated Jew, Moses, and the Egyptians is patriarchal in nature as Pharaoh's edict implies:

To our beloved son, greeting. Add to our thoughts of you, if possible to add, but a little, and you are more than old heroes. Not to bemean (*sic*) your genius, who might cry 'Was that all!'... Move! Forget not the edict. (Lines: 1-9)

The politeness in request is embodied in 'beloved son' and 'if possible'; but the imperatives 'add', 'move' and 'forget not' cancel it. This patriarchal relation caused Moses's initial narrow-mindedness, and his realisation of being controlled as reflected in his soliloquy: "I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor" (line: 51), is metaphorically represented as a kind of open-mindedness and comprehensive rather than limited awareness:

As a mountain side
Wakes aware of its other side,
When from a cave a leopard comes,
On its heels the same red sand,
Springing with acquainted air,
Sprang an intelligence

(lines: 52-8)

He realises his previous 'spiritual' blindness which "Showed to my dull outer eyes/ The living eyes underneath." (lines: 60-1). His spiritual freedom was impeded by physical desire, as implied in his relation with Koelue (his beloved and the daughter of Abinoah, the overseer who is obsessed with hatred of the Jews). Therefore, his recovery is achieved through the integration of the physical and the mental to create a body of 'red sand' in which both his 'outer eyes' and 'the living eyes underneath' are now aware of each other. The new revelation stresses the need for independence and self-assertion: "I have a trouble in my mind for largeness." (Line: 447). The metaphoric power image of size brings altogether the physical and the mental, and may touch upon Oedipal relations: "to prick the veins of father, monitor, foe." (Line: 72.) Moses realises this and responds: "I am too much awake now - restless, so restless." (Line: 89). He also rejects the silence in "Ode To David's Harp": "Voices thunder, voices of deeds not done" (Line: 125). Now physicality and spirituality (sublimation) go hand in hand: "Virgin silences waiting a breaking voice", (Line: 130).

Moses's killing of Abinoah, (Koelue's father, an anti-Semite who discriminates against the Jews while he is performing his duty as Pharaoh's eye) is a rebellion against the 'current situation' in Europe. Abinoah is anti-Semitic; of the public he says: "But mud and lice and Jews are very busy/ Breeding plagues in ease"(lines: 373-4), and of Moses: "Isis! to let a Jew have her for nothing" (line: 403), which suggests a price to be paid. Jon Silkin interpreted such Rosenbergian attitudes as a representation of the struggle of the Jewish proletariat to achieve social change for the working-class and immigrants in British society, and claimed that the Anglo-Jewish community's neglect of Rosenberg was caused by its "philistine" and "materialistic" nature, which is exactly what Rosenberg himself was attacking: "Rosenberg broke with the traditional role of the Jewish victim... as well as a society whose upper class imposed on its poor those economic and cultural taxes with which it kept its position intact."⁵⁹ More than that, it is a rejection of the 'assimilation'. Moses's sacrifice of his love for Koelue announces his rejection of his status as an assimilated Egyptian 'hand'; from now on, he is Jewish:

What were the use, if my sight grew,
And its far branches were cloud hung,
You, small at the roots, like grass.
While the new lips my spirit would kiss
Were not red lips of flesh,
But the huge kiss of power.

(Lines: 185-90)

Once again Rosenberg's emphasis on lips and mouths recurs, designating his desire for spiritual and mental power which is, perhaps, the power of his literary voice by which he speaks out the suppressed words of his race. Moses was cheated: "He lay in nets of their women"(line: 261). Koelue, like the assimilation for the Jew, is not sufficient for Moses's desire for 'largeness', and the accompanying spiritual and immortal 'kiss of power'. Before the assimilation, both the 'material' and the 'spiritual' needs of the Jews were under pressure from Gentile society. The assimilation was welcomed at the beginning because it offered a release for the

⁵⁹ Jon Silkin, "The Forgotten Poet Of Anglo-Jewry", *Jewish Chronicle* (August. 1960). The same statement recurs in "The War, the Class And the Jews", *Stand*, IV (1960), p. 35, where Silkin relates this to a "society that includes its working class and émigrés."

suppressed 'material' need, but because the 'spiritual' remained suppressed, the assimilation was insufficient.

The debate between the two Hebrews is a further dramatisation of Rosenberg's demand of the Jewish community to achieve Moses's realisation. The Young Hebrew is optimistic, and tries to convince the Old Hebrew of Moses's potential:

I've seen men hugely shapen in soul
Of such unhuman shaggy male turbulence
They tower in foam miles from our neck-strained sight.
And to their shop only heroes come.
But all were cripples to this speed
Constrained to the stables of flesh.

...
The streaming vigours of his blood erupting
From his halt tongue is like an anger thrust
Out of a madman's piteous craving for
A monstrous baulked perfection.

(lines: 237-42 & 247-50)

The descriptions here seem over-plenteous; adjective piled upon adjective, as if to show the rich resources open to the speaker. The Young Hebrew recognises Moses's spiritual rebirth, by which the latter differs from the other heroes who are "Constrained to the stables of flesh;" Moses is "craving for... perfection." However, pessimistic and suspicious, the Old Hebrew meditates: "His [Young Hebrew's] youth is flattered at Moses's kind speech to him", and then tells him:

I am broken and grey, have seen much in my time,
...
I have seen splendid young fools cheat themselves
Into a prophet's frenzy; I have seen
So many crazed shadows puffed away,
And conscious cheats with such an ache for fame
They'd make a bonfire of themselves to be
Mouthed in the squares, broad in the public eye.

(lines: 290-9)

His pessimism results from a history of witnessing fruitless struggle, as his recurrent 'I have seen' indicates. Such history is characterised by treacherous leaders exploiting their people to make personal profit; and immediately this distinguishes Moses from his historic rivals. Rebelling against the Egyptians, rejecting Koelue and killing Abinoah prove that Moses has given up personal

profit. Earlier leaders were men of words rather than deeds “to be/ Mouthed in the squares.” Moses, however, is known through monologues and soliloquies, not public speeches (as in his long monologue at the beginning of the play, lines 28-199). He is active and violent: “Voices thunder, voices of deeds not done.”(line: 125)

It is true that “this conflict between the two Hebrews may well be, besides the dramatic means of giving information, an allusion to the fighting of the two Hebrews in the Bible.”⁶⁰

And when he [Moses] went out the second day, behold two men of the Hebrews strove together, and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us. (Exodus, II: 13, 14)

However, this allusion has further significance, as it promotes Moses’s attempted social change. The Biblical incident alludes to social corruption and the need for change; as Max Margolis and Alexander Marx put it: “he [Moses] also witnessed the demoralisation among the oppressed, when one Hebrew, striving with another, met the rebuke of Moses.”⁶¹ There are other dramatic Biblical borrowings in the background; consider the means by which Moses tests the Pharaoh’s true intentions::

If I shut my eyes to the edict,
...
Then hide from the summoning tribunal,
Pharaoh will speak, and I’ll seize that word to act.
Should the word be a foe’s, I can use it well,

(lines: 74-9)

The same means is used by David and his friend Jonathan when trying to test Jonathan’s father’s (Saul’s) intentions, attempting a false “leave to participate in a family festival... The angry king used vituperative language about his son as well as the absent David”:⁶²

⁶⁰ Davies, p. 94.

⁶¹ Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, p. 14.

And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide my self in the field unto the third day at even.

If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.

If he say thus, It is well, thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him.

(I Samuel, 20: 5-7)

Killing Abinoah resembles the Biblical story in which Moses kills an Egyptian whom he finds killing a Jew. The ending parallels the Biblical story; the fact that Moses does not bring the suffering of the Jewish slaves to an end echoes the story in the Bible where Moses's attempt to return to the land is not completed: he merely "laid the foundation" and left the rest to be carried by the Jews after him.⁶³ "So Moses finished the work", which was the preparatory stage, after which "the children of Israel went on all their journeys." (Exodus, 40: 36). The Biblical story of the Jewish exile in Egypt is used as a symbolic context for the modern experience; and the two Hebrews might be the conflicting poles in Rosenberg's psyche.

Rosenberg exploited Moses's violent nature to introduce implicitly his desire for social change. The violence he depicted combines the spirit and the body: spiritual violence is presented as a prerequisite for action, while physical violence as a servant for the spirit. Because it is not an attempt to satisfy physical desire, physical violence is itself a rejection of physicality. For instance, Moses's killing of Abinoah is an act of physical violence but it is also an abandonment of the physical pleasure of his relation with Koelue. Moses ends up by achieving purity of the spirit, an aim Rosenberg always desired. In a letter describing the parts of his book *Youth*, he said:

I've a scheme for a little book called 'Youth', in three parts.

1. Faith and fear.
2. The cynic's lamp.
3. Sunfire.

⁶² Ibid., p. 41.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 20.

In the first, the idealistic youth believes and aspires towards purity...

In the second, The cynic's lamp, the youth has become hardened by bitter experience and has no more vague aspirations, he is just sense...

In the third, Change and sunfire, the spiritualizing takes place. He has no more illusions, but life itself becomes transfigured through Imagination, that is, real intimacy - love.(CW, 211)

The goal is 'spiritualizing' which takes place in the last part where Moses achieves 'real love', uniting the body and the soul, leading to a Judaic understanding of the purity and cleanness of the body: "Nothing in the human body is unclean; all of it is pure."⁶⁴ Thus, man has to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh:

Jewish morality is an aid to the healthful and pleasurable exercise of physical instinct, hence we have in the Jew a being at once moral and sensual, gifted with a highly-trained and well-regulated appetite for sensuous enjoyment.⁶⁵

Important here is the comprehensive vision of man's physicality and spirituality.

This may even mark a distinction between Hellenism and Hebraism as uncovered by Matthew Arnold, who distinguished between Hellenistic "*spontaneity*" and Hebraic "*strictness*" of consciousness; 'spontaneity' addresses the soul, and 'strictness' the body and the spirit, linking conduct and belief.⁶⁶ In the section on 'Hebraism and Hellenism', Arnold wrote:

Hebraism and Hellenism,- between these two points of influence moves our world...

Both Hellenism and Hebraism arise out of the wants of human nature, and address themselves to satisfying those wants. But their methods are so different...

The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience... The Greek quarrel with the body and its desire is, that they hinder right thinking, the Hebrew quarrel with them is, that they hinder right acting.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Isidore Epstein, *The Jewish Way Of Life* (London: Edward Goldstone, 1946), p.124.

⁶⁵ Davies, p.22.

⁶⁶ Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960-77), (forthcoming references abbreviated as *CPW*), vol. v, pp. 165ff.

⁶⁷ *CPW*, vol. V, pp. 163; 167; 165

Arnold strikes a distinction between right thinking and right acting; but between the same antitheses, Rosenberg worked to strike a hard bargain, an arranged marriage of both the physical and the spiritual under the aegis of what he called 'real love', and which he explained in a letter to Mrs Joslen:

Love belongs to man's desire for God. Lust does not wholly satisfy, because in it, man expressed only his mortality. But in love man could identify himself with divinity.⁶⁸

Love alone is spiritual; lust physical. 'Real love' is both, love of the immortal and spiritual and lust for the mortal and physical.

But how does this apply to Rosenberg if he is to be taken as a new leader? Jon Silkin noted that Jews ignored Rosenberg out of 'fear' and 'spiritual insensitivity':

The Jewish community in this country is, largely, philistine. An increasingly materialistic and growing working class makes it difficult to be otherwise.⁶⁹

'Philistine', a word which in the nineteenth century meant a person lacking in culture and interested in common things (OED, 4), calls up Arnold once again. It is not surprising to find a Jewish poet and critic like Silkin applying it against his own race in the same way that Arnold used it to account for a spiritual decline caused by materialistic tendencies dominating British culture. Silkin used it to serve a number of goals: first, he exploited it to assert that the Jews are a community in Britain with their own culture and literature, though also suffering from a cultural decline: "One of the symptoms of a decaying culture is its inability to recognise and assimilate the experiences and ideas of its writers. The Anglo-Jewish community fits this classification with terrifying ease."⁷⁰ Equally important are the second message that the Anglo-Jewish community should 'assimilate' the ideas of its writers and thinkers; and his third, which draws their attention to the fact that by becoming philistine with regard to their culture they were not assimilating

⁶⁸ Unpublished manuscript, quoted in Davies, p. 23; Rosenberg's words here were recalled by Sonia Cohen.

⁶⁹ Silkin, "The Forgotten Poet of Anglo-Jewry".

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Jewish but rather English and Gentile attitudes, hence falling in the trap of the assimilation which was their major problem. They were obsessed with materialism, which meant to Rosenberg spiritual death:

But this pettifogging, mercantile, money-loving age is deaf, dead as their dead idol gold, and dead as that to all higher ennobling influences. (*CW*, 190)

Rosenberg attacked the age not the Jew, an attitude similar to Karl Marx's account of the Jewish question, in which he argued that the idea of the emancipation should overcome religious boundaries, in particular the perception of Jews as inferior by Gentiles:

Political emancipation is indeed a great step forward... Man emancipates himself *politically* from religion by banishing it from the sphere of public law into private right... The *disintegration* of man into Jew and citizen, Protestant and citizen, religious man and citizen does not belie citizenship or circumvent political emancipation ⁷¹

Marx found this awareness of religion as a major problem in Jewish emancipation in the West because "it transforms the question of Jewish emancipation into a purely religious one."⁷² Thus, the Jew is the product of the rules and the manners of the Western society which governed and shaped Jewish behaviour: "out of its own entrails, civil society ceaselessly produces the Jew."⁷³ And like Arnold's distinction between Hebraic interest in conduct and Hellenistic care for belief, Marx's defence of the Jew shows that both Christianity and Judaism share similar perceptions, except that "the Christian was the theorizing Jew. Hence the Jew is the practical Christian."⁷⁴ In this sense, Marx's account bears an indirect message to the Jews, drawing their attention to their adoption of a Christian separation of Conduct from Belief, which has caused them to become more Christian than Jew. Jewish identity can be achieved only by realising this lack of spiritual motivation. Again, social change is central, for in it physicality is not the only reality but rather

⁷¹ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. and ed. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 227.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

part of a continuum which joins it with spirituality. Moses's power is meant to: "grandly fashion these rude elements/ Into some newer nature, a consciousness." (Lines: 466-9). This achieves "Solidity as human life can be." (Line 465).

The theme of change as represented by the symbolic death of the stage of alienation to become a root for a new revival is deeply related to time and place. Suffering is associated with the 'here and now' the end of which is to be achieved in the 'there and then'. Thus, as revealed in "Through These Pale Cold Days", a journey is to be started in an attempt to leave the current place of depression and sorrow to seek a better future somewhere else. In fact, Rosenberg's persona is associated with an archetypal journey of self-discovery, search for identity, knowledge and experience. He perceives the life of the persona, his own life, in terms of a journey. The description of the parts of *Youth* designates a journey towards a goal during which experience is gained and at the end of which change takes place. A recurring emphasis on the journey motif is evident in the heavy exploitation of such lexical items as journey, wander, sail, flight, ship, wings and quest.⁷⁵ The persona's journey is spiritual:

And my soul thought,
 'What fearful land have my steps wandered to?
"A Ballad Of Whitechapel" (lines 17-8)

And the poet lives a spiritual journey, searching for parts of his 'divided self':

To his divided self he calls and sings the story of earth's wrongs.
 ...
 And wandered down its [earth's] sunless days...
"The Poet (I)" (lines 9-11)

Indeed, constant emphasis on loneliness ("My lonely flight" in "Far Away") and on 'wandering for ever' are allusions to the myth of the Wandering Jew.

The myth, so central because it is rooted in the relation between the Jews and the Christians, has many variations but it is generally a negative depiction of

⁷⁵ In addition to the quoted poems on the 'journey' motif, see also "Dawn Behind Night" (line: 15), "The Cage" (line: 4), "Night" (line: 12), "A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory" (line: 3), "Far Away" (line: 2), "Dawn" (line: 16) and "The Cloister" (line: 1).

the Jew cursed by Jesus to wander the earth till the Second Coming.⁷⁶ The Wandering Jew is depicted as a blacksmith, sometimes a shoemaker, in Jerusalem. G. K. Anderson referred to an “unprinted eighteenth century chap-book... *The Wandering Jew, or The Shoe-maker of Jerusalem*,” which reads:

This Jew was born at Jerusalem, and was by trade a shoe-maker, when our Saviour was going to the place of crucifixion, being weary and faint, he would have sat down to rest at the shoe-maker's stall, but the shoe-maker came to the door and spitting in our Lord's face buffeted him from the door, saying, that was no place of abode for him. On which Christ said, for this thing, thou shalt never rest, but wander till I come again upon the earth⁷⁷

Typically, the misdemeanour of the Wandering Jew is his unwillingness to allow Jesus a temporary rest, in some variations insulting Christ in not allowing Him clean water to drink:

Christ, on His way to the cross, stopped and asked a passer-by for a drink. He was contemptuously referred to a puddle of water lying in the road and was told that that was good enough for an enemy of Moses.⁷⁸

The myth was common in European folklore.⁷⁹ “The plight of the Wandering Jew has formed the basis for innumerable literary plots in both prose and poetry.”⁸⁰ The Wandering Jew is also considered a “Christian invention.”⁸¹ Anderson claimed that the Wandering Jew had survived in England, and came to be associated with certain birds (such as the doterrel) as a bad omen: “for the person who heard the Wandering Jew, as he called the doterrel, would certainly be overtaken by a

⁷⁶ For whether Wandering Jew is a myth or a legend see Eduard Konig, “The Wandering Jew: Legend Or Myth”, in *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation Of A Christian Legend*, ed. Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes (eds.) (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 11-27.

⁷⁷ G. K. Anderson, “Popular Survivals of the Wandering Jew in England”, in Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (eds.), p. 84; for other variations see Konig.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

⁷⁹ See for example Anderson or Champfleury, “French Images of The Wandering Jew”, in Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (eds.), pp. 68-75; Hasan-Rokem, “The Cobbler Of Jerusalem in Finnish Folklore”, in Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes (eds.), pp. 119-53; Bengt af Klintberg, “The Swedish Wanderings of The Eternal Jew”, in Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (eds.), pp. 154-68.

⁸⁰ Hasan-Rokem and Dundes, p. VIII.

⁸¹ R. Edelmann, “Ahasuerue, The Wandering Jew: Origin and Background”, in Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (eds.), p. 3.

misfortune.”⁸² Anderson discovered another association with certain plants such as *zebrina pandula*.⁸³ Most of the time, the Jew’s loneliness, his endless wandering, and suffering are emphasised; and beyond that, his thirst and prophetic powers.

Rosenberg knew the myth, as his comment on Ospovat’s work shows: “when he is personal as in... ‘The Wandering Jew’, he shows a strength sweetened by refinement that is rare.” (*CW*, 288). In addition to ‘wandering for ever’, the persona’s inability to put an end to his journey of suffering, his unfulfilled death wish, and imprisonment all resemble the Wandering Jew. Another aspect of affinity between the persona and the Wandering Jew is that of the immortality of his body, a sign of the continuous life of suffering:

From dawn through day to dawn,
Bravely as though their journey but begun,
Through change unchanged still.

“A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory” (lines 2-4)

There are certain places where an implicit criticism of society is incorporated in association with Christianity; the persona’s suffering is related to the people’s ‘pride’, the mother of sin in Christianity: “In the blood they feed but to drink of, in the pity they feign in their pride” (“Dawn Behind Night”). When related to the myth of the Wandering Jew, such emphasis on pride becomes a reflection on the Christian association of sin to the Jew. Since the myth corresponds to the Christian supposition that with the Second Coming the Jews will voluntarily embrace the Christian faith, it is considered a Christian unconscious attempt to validate their creed. That the older Judaism yields to the younger Christianity is considered an oedipal rejection of the father.⁸⁴ Jungian interpretations think of it as ‘wish fulfilment’.⁸⁵ Jung says:

⁸² Anderson, p. 82.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 82.

⁸⁴ E. Isaac-Edersheim, “A Mythic Image of The Jew”, in Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (eds.), pp. 195-210.

⁸⁵ See for example S. Hurwitz, “Ahasver, The Eternal Wanderer: Psychological Aspects”, in Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes (eds.), pp. 211-26.

He was changed into a devil by Christianity . . . the motif of the wanderer who has not accepted Christ, was projected on to the Jews, just as we always rediscover our own psychic contents, which have become unconscious, in other people.⁸⁶

Rosenberg's previous reference to Moses as the root of Christ - Moses being the essence of perfection - alludes to this perception. Thus, in "The Jew", the persona, in an angry tone, wonders:

The blond, the bronze, the ruddy,
With the same heaving blood,
Keep tide to the moon of Moses,
Then why do they sneer at me?

(lines 5-8)

A further example with political colouring appears in "Dead Man's Dump":

The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old.

(lines 1-4)

Here a significant association between torturing and majesty is camouflaged; crowns and sceptres are majestic (royal) associations. There is also a religious aspect; this motif is a staple of the New Testament referring to Christ's torment. (Mat. 27: 29) However, Rosenberg is unable to present these criticisms plainly; he leaves them at the level of implication. In "The Jew" the references are very clear because Rosenberg wrote it when he was in South Africa, where he would encounter less of the pressures of the British reading public.

Robert Gordis has significantly commented on the relationship between figurative language and primitive man:

Instead of calling a thing or act directly by name, we replace it by an epithet or comparison that suggests it without naming it... By displacing certain words through epithets, he felt he was escaping the spiritual dangers that lurked in their use.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ C. G. Jung, *Essays on Contemporary Events* (London: E. Arnold, 1912), p. 195.

⁸⁷ Robert Gordis, *The Word and the Book: Studies in Biblical Language and Literature* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1976), p. 149.

Rosenberg's letters have clearer hints such as his previous attitude towards London. Liddiard noticed that in his poem "Home Thoughts From France", where he echoes an English poet (Browning's "Home Thoughts From Abroad"), Rosenberg was not nostalgic for England and, rather, expressed a sense of being outcast.⁸⁸ Thus Liddiard argued that:

As a Jew brought up in the East End of London... His allegiances were to individuals - to English poets rather than to the tradition of English poetry - to his family and friends rather than to an abstract conception of England.⁸⁹

Rosenberg's Jewishness is always presented within a fused Jewish and British context. In one of his letters, he expressed his interest in writing a play about the Jewish hero 'Judas Maccabeus' but he was afraid of being too personal:

I have thoughts of a play round our Jewish hero, Judas Maccabeus... I am not decided whether truth of the period is a good quality or a negative one... It decides the tone of the work, though it makes it hard to give the human side and make it more living. (*CW*, 248-9)

Therefore, while his persona's own life journey is manoeuvred within the journey of Judas Maccabeus, Moses, and the Wandering Jew, it is also represented in a more intimate journey:

I wander - I wander - O will she wander here?
Where'er my footsteps carry me I know that she is near.

"Day" (lines 191-2)

Consequently, Rosenberg places his own, and his people's, suffering and lack of Jewish identity in a universal context. He wanted to address Jews and Gentiles altogether, so that his concerns would gain larger public response. This attitude represents his commitment to the problems of his people, his Jewishness and his own desire to achieve fame as a poet in the British community at large and avoid the problem of the 'exclusive nature' of Jewish literature he realised. He once said: "I like to think of myself as a poet." (*CW*, 269). Between the two

⁸⁸ Liddiard, p. 206.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

conflicting desires, Rosenberg successfully transforms the personal to the universal, maintaining its personal roots and giving it a cosmopolitan dimension. He fuses his Jewish background and concerns with those of the British culture where he lived. In fact, this brings him near to the Zionist discourse.

In order to achieve political support for the movement, Zionism was linked with the theme of “political enfranchisement of the Jews” and to “other national movements of the nineteenth century which had brought independence to Italy, to Greece and to many smaller countries.”⁹⁰ That is, “Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.”⁹¹ Fisch drew attention to the linguistic ‘deep structure’ of this statement showing that it reflects the “liberal declarations of the nineteenth century; change a word or two and it might be a motto for Mazzini or Garibaldi in their striving for Italian unity.”⁹² Thus, Zionism worked on two levels: a Jewish national level and a political international level. The latter was at the centre of Herzl’s ‘theory of rationality’ which meant keeping Zionism in “accord with the normally accepted laws of political behaviour.”⁹³ The aim was, then, to create a ‘Jewish Myth.’⁹⁴ And to become a myth, it needed to be both national and universal; that is, to spring from a particular race and be presented as a less subjective human phenomenon. As Laqueur puts it: “Zionism had neither money, nor military power, nor even much political nuisance value. It could rely only on moral persuasion.”⁹⁵ It is through such an approach that Zionism could later achieve support from liberal politicians such as Lord Balfour who made the so-called Balfour Declaration of 1917, which authorised the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Balfour and Lloyd George, “were persuaded by Weizmann to issue the declaration... not because it

⁹⁰ Fisch, p. 6.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 6. Arrangements of the 1897 Basle program, originally in D. Vital, *The Origins Of Zionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 368.

⁹² Fisch, p.6.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁵ Laqueur, p. 594.

was advantageous... from the British point of view, but because they accepted that it was the right thing to do.”⁹⁶

Rosenberg's last poems of 1918, “The Burning of the Temple”, “The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Hordes” and “Through These Pale Cold Days”, show how he was moving rapidly towards the Jewish history and tradition for his themes. Davies regards it as an indication of “how deeply he was coming to rely on the tradition of the Jews when he died.”⁹⁷ While this is considered an indication that Rosenberg's preoccupation with his Jewishness was developing and getting refined, it was an inevitable development for a Jewish author experiencing the assimilation. Thus, it is not strange that, in his last poems before his death, Rosenberg was thinking of the burning of the temple, (which was a tragic catastrophe in the history of the Jews when in 586 BC the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem), or of the Journey back to Hebron as themes for his poetry. He used his Jewish background to represent the Jews in his time; but he also used it to symbolise modern society. Like Zionism, he worked on a national Jewish level and a larger international human one. He believed in literature as a means of achieving Jewish identity; in his previous comment on Amschewitz and Ospovat he asserted the Jewish “exclusive atmosphere such as our literature possesses.” (*CW*, 287). Rosenberg's comment on the Jewish poet and writer Heinrich Heine asserts the same attitude: “I admire him more for always being a Jew at heart than anything else.” (*CW*, 242).⁹⁸ Rosenberg mentioned Heine twice in his letters (*CW*, 242; 261)

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 594.

⁹⁷ Davies, p. 40.

⁹⁸ Rosenberg owned an anthology of Heine's poems (*CW*, 261). The translated English version of Heine's work available at the time and which Rosenberg probably read is *The Poems of Heine: Complete*, trans. Edgar Alfred Bowring (London, George Bell & Sons, 1887; repr. 1961; 1966;). Heine was fashionable among learned Jewish and Gentile communities in England at the time. But Heine's appearance in England, is attributed to Arnold; see Liptzin's “Heine, the Continuator of Goethe: A Mid-Victorian Legend” in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 43. 1944, pp. 317-25: “The legend of Heine is a mid-Victorian legend... but it is Matthew Arnold, in his essay of 1863, who lends it its widest currency.” (p. 317). Liptzin also argues that “*Philistinism*- the word was little known to the English. Arnold took it from Heine and popularised it among the mid-Victorians.” (p. 323) Rosenberg used some of Arnold's vocabulary, among which there are such concepts as ‘barbarians’ and ‘philistines’. He probably first knew Heine through Arnold. There are parallels between Rosenberg's love for Heine ‘remaining a Jew at heart’ and Arnold's appreciation of Heine's treatment of the latter's Jewishness ; in addition Rosenberg's admiration of Heine's “Princess Sabbath” echoes Arnold's article on Heine, with a reference to the same poem. See Arnold's “Heinrick Heine” *CPW*, vol. 3, pp. 107ff.

and the most appealing work of Heine to him was a “a beautiful poem called ‘Princess Sabbath’.” (*CW*, 261). It is in this poem where Rosenberg’s idea of the ‘exclusive nature our literature possesses’ appears. The poem celebrates the image of the Jew as a prince on the Sabbath night as opposed to the Gentile image of him as a dog:

Of a prince so used by fortune
Is the song I sing. His name is
Israel. A witch’s magic
Has transformed him to a dog.

Greetings to you, cherished mansion
Of my noble lord and father!
Tents of Jacob, see, I kiss your
Holy doorposts with my lips.”

(Lines: 13-6; 29-32)⁹⁹

It is in such a poem that Rosenberg finds the Jew rising above the Gentiles’ inferior and subordinate perception of him. The fact that such works by Jews celebrate the dignity of the Jew accounts for Rosenberg’s idea of the exclusive nature of Jewish art and literature, a nature that is developed to compensate for and respond to the image of the Jew in a large number of Gentile works of literature such as Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* where Fagin is depicted as a dog and a rat, as further discussed in Chapter Five. There is no evidence that Rosenberg became a paid-up member of the Zionist movement.¹⁰⁰ During the Whitechapel years, Rosenberg’s friends, including Joseph Leftwich, Samuel Winsten, John Rodker and David Bomberg, had, as his biographer Jean Liddiard asserted, “socialist concerns”, which were associated with a “growing interest in Zionism, and Rosenberg’s sisters collected money in support of the cause... Once again, Rosenberg could not follow his friends all the way into the Zionist movement or active political involvement... His Jewishness... was religious, but for him its impulse was towards the creative life.”¹⁰¹ However, his theme of change, imagery of alienation, growth and

⁹⁹ Translated from Heinrich Heine, *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version*, trans. Hal Draper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, c1982), pp. 651ff.

¹⁰⁰ E. O. G. Davies has made a successful treatment of Rosenberg’s Jewishness. However, critics overlooked Rosenberg’s relation to Zionism, except Jean Liddiard’s passing reference while commenting on Rosenberg’s frequent habit of joining and quickly quitting friendships an example of which is Rosenberg’s case with his Zionist friends; *Isaac Rosenberg: the Half Used Life* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), p. 45.

organism and concept of time and place echo Zionism, asserting the need to achieve a Jewish national identity, building on their shared history and culture, criticising the insufficiency of Gentile notion of 'assimilation' and expressing hope for a better future of equal national existence as others. These are parts of the expression of the need for such an identity, one outlet of which is literature. Therefore, Rosenberg's poetry appealed to his publisher Israel Narodiczky, who was an 'ardent Zionist'.¹⁰² Rosenberg was aware that to be a Jewish writer in a Gentile world meant lack of recognition; indeed he feared excommunication:

G. B. [Gordon Bottomley] has urged me to write Jewish Plays. I am quite sure if I do I will be boycotted and excommunicated, that is, assuming my work is understood. (CW, 247)

Even though he tried to maintain in his poetry a balance between his Jewish identity and the Gentile country where he lived, he was neglected, as if those who neglected him entirely understood his aim. While his work falls within the limits of the exclusive nature of Jewish literature, under the skin of his poetry he is evidently Jewish. His relation to Zionism is that of 'the methodology is ideology'.

¹⁰¹ Liddiard, pp. 42-6.

¹⁰² See Parsons, p 221, not 1; see also Cohen, *Journey to The Trenches*, pp. 78-9; 203. Narodiczky published Rosenberg's *Night and Day*, *Youth* and *Moses*.

Chapter Two

The Dead Past

Imaginative writers seem to be on the same side as the... author of *The Interpretation of Dreams*... they are far in advance of us everyday people.¹

Works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me, especially those of literature.²
Sigmund Freud

'Past days are hieroglyphs'

In "The Dead Past", written in 1911, Rosenberg reveals an awareness of the distinctive relation between earlier and later stages of man's life. The title implies the past's lack of life and power while the poem asserts the opposite; though the past is dead, it still lives in the persona's mind:

Ah! will I meet you ever - you who have gone from me,
You, the I that was then and a moment hath changed into you.
So many moments have passed and changed the I into we,
So many many times but alas I remember so few.

(Lines: 1-4)³

The persona in Rosenberg's poem solves the riddle by showing later the manner in which the past turns out still to be alive:

¹ Sigmund Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*" in ed. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74) (afterwards referred to as *SE*), vol. 9, p.8.

² Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo" in *SE*, vol. 13, p 211.

³ The play on the pronouns recalls Thomas Hardy's "The Voice", where he addresses his missed love:

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

(Lines: 1-4)

Just as Hardy misses a time when he was united with his beloved, Rosenberg also feels nostalgia. However, Hardy's poem is dated December 1912 as in Samuel Hynes's edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), while Rosenberg's poem appeared earlier.

O my life's dead Springtime - why will you haunt me like ghosts,
 You little buds that have died - and blossom in memory,
 Will I meet you in some dead land and see your face in hosts,
 Saying 'The past is the future and you and the future are we'?

(Lines: 13-6)

The past exists in 'memory' which assails the persona's mind in the shape of 'ghosts'. V. M. R. Tallett found this an indication of Rosenberg's preoccupation with Jungian psychological themes about the unconscious.⁴ Further reading in the poem shows how it represents a Freudian perception of memory and the unconscious.

The persona explicitly relates the suppressed past desires to his childhood:

I know you are dead, long perished, the boy that babbled and played
 With the toys like the wind with the flowers and the clouds play with the moon.

(Lines: 5-6)

Childhood is associated with natural behaviour ("like the wind with the flowers and the clouds play with the moon") rather than socially-recognised manners of conduct. But still the persona's account here is that of the grown-up who is no longer a child; it is an account of his past. The third stanza shows how the child behaves unaware of the teachings of society:

You too are dead, the shining face that laughed and wept without thought
 Uttered the words of the heart, wept or leapt as was right.

...

I do not know yours was best, you not conscious of your delight.

(Lines: 9-12)

The child acts 'without thought' and 'utter[s] the words of the heart', 'not conscious of your [his] delight'. The fact that the child 'wept or leapt as was right' further clarifies how he is governed by his own natural behaviour as 'was' right to him. This shows that the grown-up persona is now aware that what was once 'right' no longer is. It is for this reason that the past is dead and lives only in the memory, which in turn becomes the store of no-longer right repressed behaviour. Rosenberg interpreted this in his prose: "youth is still childhood. When we cast off every

⁴ V. M. R. Tallett, "Visionary and Revolutionary Impulses in the works of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Leeds, 1991, pp. 7-8.

cloudy vesture and our thoughts are clear and mature; when every act is a conscious thought, every thought an attempt to arrest feelings". (CW, 302).

In a Freudian sense, the socially unlawful past desires are suppressed in the unconscious, only to be revived in memories. Freud's meditations on the idea of memory of past experience, perhaps even of childhood, in relation to a preceding act of 'forgetfulness', reveals more:

There is a kind of forgetting which is distinguished by the difficulty with which the memory is awakened even by a powerful external summons, as though some internal resistance were struggling against its revival. A forgetting of this kind has been given the name of 'repression' in psychopathology... Now we do not know in general whether the forgetting of an impression is linked with the dissolution of its memory-trace in the mind; but we can assert quite definitely of 'repression' that it does not coincide with dissolution or extinction of the memory. What is repressed, it is true, as a rule makes its way into memory without more ado; but it retains a capacity for effective action, and the influence of some external event, it may one day bring about psychical consequences which can be regarded as products of a modification of the forgotten memory and as derivatives of it and which remain intelligible unless we take this view of them.⁵

Then, memories are modified socially unaccepted phenomenon, modified to slip censorship; before their modification they hide in the unconscious. Rosenberg says something similar:

I know you are dead long ago and hid in the grove I made.
Of regrets that were soon forgotten, as snow is forgotten by June.

(Lines: 7-8)

In this way, the persona is now uttering 'the words of the heart' but in a manner that conforms to the power of the super-ego and its censorship. Unlike the early child who acts 'without thought', he now thinks how to act, announcing that the past is dead but implying that it is still alive and will play a role in shaping his acts to-come ("the past is the future and you and the future are we".) Rosenberg's unfinished cancelled verse from this poem supports the proposition that he is alluding to the pressures of the society, but also the strains of his own personality:

⁵ Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", p. 34.

I in this workaday world, little joy do I know -
Books, pictures and sometimes friends...

He surrounded himself with art; and the admission that he encountered friends only 'sometimes' perhaps announces an innate lack of sociability. Then again, it is perhaps possible to read these lines as allusions to incidents from Rosenberg's own life: reading books in the Whitechapel library, a haven for all those who were, like his friends, poverty-stricken. H. L. Hawkins has emphasised how poor students, artists, musicians and poets, such as Israel Zangwill and Rosenberg, sought sanctuary there.⁶ Since the library provided them with up-to-date books and sources, its importance to Rosenberg is far from trivial. It was here that he first came into contact with other poetic and artistic experiences through published materials, and where he used to write poems and meet with friends with whom he exchanged views on art and poetry and from whom he sought judgement, evaluation and advice regarding his artistic and literary production. In fact, the name Whitechapel is a title of a critical stage in Rosenberg's life, a fact that is acknowledged in Liddiard's biography of Rosenberg where the second chapter is entitled 'The Whitechapel' to discuss a central period in the artistic development of Rosenberg.⁷ Thus when the persona of "The Dead Past" describes the 'little joy' he derived from books, pictures and friends, a strong affinity with Rosenberg's life during the Whitechapel stage is being suggested.

Indeed, Rosenberg's perception bears strong parallels with Freud's meditations on the origins of creative writing and thought, in which he pointed out the sources from which "the strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable."⁸ Freud considered the source to be childhood, the domain of first traces of imaginative activity which is the essence of the child's most loved activity of playing with his

⁶ H. L. Hawkins, "Whitechapel: The Reference Library", in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 7 December, 1951, p. 23.

⁷ Jean Liddiard, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half-Used Life* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), pp. 34-52.

⁸ Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming", *SE*, vol. 9, p. 143.

games: "Might not we say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?"⁹ He went on to explain that the child knows that his objects are imaginative and thus tries to connect them with the reality around him; that is, the child does not 'phantasise'. On the other hand, the creative writer, who resorts to the imaginative faculty just as the child, "creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously - that is, which he invents with large amounts of emotions - while separating it from reality."¹⁰

The importance of such a difference between the child and the creative writer is centred around understanding the significant distinction between child's 'play' and the creative writer's 'phantasy'. The child does not care to hide his playing from the grown-ups, but as an adult he starts to phantasise rather than play, for to play at this stage is to encounter feelings of shame and embarrassment. By phantasising he conceals his playing from the other people: "as a rule, he would rather confess his misdeeds than tell anyone his phantasies".¹¹ Phantasies are, then, adult substitutes for childhood playing, for, as Freud argues, though the grown-ups seem to have given up the pleasure of playing, they do not give it up; instead they exchange it for another thing: phantasy.¹² Here comes the significant difference between phantasy ('day dream' as Freud called it), and play; phantasy enables the grown-up to avoid the shame of childhood play: "phantasies are less easy to observe than the play of children," and it can serve the same aim of playing for, like playing, it is a fulfilment of a wish that lacks satisfaction in the individual's life, the surrounding reality in which he dwells.¹³

This can actually be seen in Rosenberg's poem; he insists that he merely remembers the past which is dead, as if trying to say that he no longer behaves as a

⁹ Ibid., p. 143-4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 145.

¹² Ibid., p. 145.

¹³ Ibid., p. 145.

child. In this sense, he is developing a substitute for playing by phantasising, though his poem is rooted in his childhood. As Freud described the phenomena:

A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work... the stress it lays on childhood memories in the writer's life... is ultimately derived from the assumption that a piece of creative writing, like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood.¹⁴

Poetry enables the poet to satisfy the suppressed wish of replaying the pleasure of childhood, that is no longer 'right', without the hazards of undergoing a sense of shame or embarrassment.

The idea of the dead past as living in the persona's mind through memory is strongly related to the theme of rebirth, suggesting that the past is reborn again. It was claimed earlier that Rosenberg's idea of change in relation to time is associated with rebirth which reveals a desire for a future fulfilment of repressed past desires. The present is hence depicted as "Thou art the link 'twixt after and before... Endeavour of the ages" ("The Present"). Associating the present with the image of the 'root' enforces its relation to the past and suggests the re-growth of the past in the future. And it was also argued that such an idea of time reveals an awareness of an internal conflict between different stages of the persona's life in his psyche as well as between his mind and body, physicality, and social constraints. This resulted in rejecting the assimilation, for, though it recognised the desires of the body, it failed to respond to the needs of the mind and the spirit, hence lacking awareness of both the body and the soul as an indivisible whole, a matter which will later be related to the religious background of Freudian psychoanalysis where the division between the spirit and the body is overcome. Such a symbolic and psychological idea of rebirth is evident in "My Days", written in 1911:

My days are but the tombs of buried hours;
Which tombs are hidden in the piléd years;
But from the mounds there springeth up such flowers
Whose beauty well repays its cost of tears.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

Time, like a sexton, pileth mould on mould,
 Minutes on minutes till the tombs are high;
 But from the dust there falleth grains of gold,
 And the dead corpse leaves what will never die.

(Lines: 1-8)

The imagery adds a further aspect to the idea of rebirth: the poet's attempt to bring back to life what is considered dead presents him as an archaeologist who is concerned with exhumation and excavations. So, in "Her Fabled Mouth" Rosenberg is digging again: "Our lips and eyes dig up the antique glories". Significantly, Freud always resorted to similar imagery in his psychoanalytic meditations. Malcolm Bowie investigated Freud's self-images as archaeologist and conqueror, asserting that, living in an age of archaeological discoveries, Freud found in archaeology necessary conceptual models for his science, for like archaeology, psychoanalysis "is the quest for, and the systematic study of, anterior states: for Freud *that which came before*, whether in the life of a civilisation or in the life of the mind, has a peculiar and an unparalleled capacity to organise our perception of *that which is*."¹⁵ The idea of burial and entombment as an image for the act of repression in Rosenberg's poem also echoes Freud: "there is, in fact, no better analogy for repression than the burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell a victim and for which it could emerge once more through the work of spades."¹⁶

In comparing rebirth to the beauty of the flower that "well repays its cost of tears", the persona may be suggesting a sense of Freudian repression of desire. In this sense, the flowers are the poet's phantasies, particularly when Rosenberg, in a letter to Mrs. Cohen in 1912, considered art to be "blood and tears" (*CW*, 193). That is to say, Rosenberg, as a poet who not only writes poetry that relates to his suppressed wishes but also as one who understands and argues that poetry is a response to the unconscious, considers the poem to be a substituting phantasy. In other words, his poetry becomes an ally to psychoanalysis, which is, Bowie claims, a

¹⁵ Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p.18.

¹⁶ Quoted in Bowie, p. 19.

mere “wish-fulfilment”.¹⁷ Freud once confessed in a letter that his science was rooted in his personal illusions:

Can you imagine what ‘endopsychic myths’ are? They are the latest product of my mental labour. The dim inner perception of one’s own psychic apparatus stimulates illusions, which are naturally projected outwards, and characteristically into the future and a world beyond.¹⁸

Still, however, when talking about illusions, Freud is not to be misunderstood as understating his achievement; he might be suggesting that he does not fear the application of his science to his own work; illusion, he also asserts, is rooted in the individual’s desire: “we call a belief an illusion when wish-fulfilment is a prominent factor in its motivation.”¹⁹ The affinity with the image of the archaeologist explains this further:

Archaeologist and conqueror are both topographers, surveyors of terrain; both wield incisive metal implements; both return home with trophies and expect clamorous public recognition for their deeds; both are enthusiasts for hardness - whether of durable stone relics or of intransigent material will... Both phantasies seek to accredit a new science by reference to the historical past...²⁰

That is, Freud’s theories spring from personal desires for recognition. And Rosenberg frequently asserted his quest for fame, and fulfilling the wish he made in “I like to think of myself as a poet” (*CW*, 269).

In “My Days”, the persona asserts that when the suppressed desire revives, it causes the rebirth of many others:

It may be but a thought, the nursling seed
Of many thoughts, of many a high desire;
...
Like breath rekindling a smouldering fire.

(Lines: 9-12)

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁸ A letter to Fliess 12:12:1897 (no. 78) in *The Origins Of Psycho-Analysis; Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (London: Imago, 1954), p.237 (Afterward referred to as *Origins*).

¹⁹ Freud, “The Future Of An Illusion”, in *SE* vol., 12, p.31.

²⁰ Bowie, pp. 37-8.

This is a Freudian conception relating to the ideas of 'association' and 'displacement' which are ways of avoiding the censorship of the super-ego:

whereby one idea or image in the unconscious becomes a nodal point or intersection for a whole cluster of associated feelings, repressed primal memories and desires... a sign, image, word or sound can evoke through its compression a whole range of repressed wishes, emotions and thoughts.²¹

Rebirth appears as the release of the suppressed past in a new conscious manner in which condensation and association are exploited; it is a phantasy rather than play. As Freud puts it: "it is only rarely that a dream represents, or, as we might say, 'stages', a single thought: there are usually a number of them, a tissue of thoughts."²² In explaining the psychoanalytic "technique" of accounting for such a phenomena, he again asserted this:

it consists in paying no attention to the apparent connections in the manifest dream but in fixing our eyes on each portion of its content independently and in looking for its origins in the dreamer's impressions, memories, and free association.²³

The new consciously determined act is a sign of a grown up mature individual, a poet. Indeed, Rosenberg thought creation to be one way of releasing suppressed thoughts; in his lecture on *Art*, he tried "to find a sort of philosophic connection between one's thoughts and work created by mind".(CW, 289) This is how he perceived art:

Man's natural necessities, his instinct to communicate his desires, and feelings, found shape in corresponding signs and sounds; symbols which, at first crude, gradually developed and refined.(CW, 290)

Rosenberg alludes here to a connection between art and the artist's unconscious desires, which parallels Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as Freud's words where he, in an earlier quotation, described his work as "my mental labour... one's own

²¹ Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 98.

²² Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", p. 59.

²³ Ibid., p. 65. Freud also refers to "The Interpretation of Dreams" Chapter V, section A, *SE*, vol. 4, pp. 103-4.

psychic apparatus... projected outwards.” In addition, Rosenberg here suggests what Freud calls ‘displacement’ in the sense that the “energy associated with particular unconscious desire is displaced through a chain of apparently innocuous images and ideas and can thereby slip through the barrier of censorship.”²⁴

‘Association’ is a means of embedding motive in a manner that responds to the suppressed desires and also conforms to the dictates of the causes that necessitated their suppression. This psychological technique is a way of avoiding direct collision with the superego, hence turning repressed desires into phantasies. As Freud puts it:

the nature and origin of the phantasies... are the precursors of delusions. They are substitutes for and derivatives of repressed memories which a resistance will not allow to enter consciousness unaltered, but which can purchase the possibility of becoming conscious by taking account, by means of changes and distortions, of the resistance’s censorship. When this compromise has been accomplished, the memories have turned into the phantasies...²⁵

In the first stanza of “The Dead Past” where the persona “remember[s] so few” incidents of the past, a Freudian perception is reflected in the sense that only few of the repressed desires that are stored in the unconscious are released in phantasies. In addition, the act of “see[ing] your face in hosts” (line 15) alludes to the concepts of ‘association’ and ‘displacement’, which are means of finding satisfaction for repressed desires in a ‘substitute’ or ‘derivative’ which thus becomes representative of those suppressed wishes ‘associated’ with it.

Pam Morris has claimed that both concepts, ‘association’ and ‘displacement’, “are useful ones for literary criticism in that poetic language often seems to function in strikingly similar ways.”²⁶ While this means that the way poetry works is related to these concepts, it should be noted that in the case of Rosenberg his poetry not only achieves this but also asserts his awareness of this fact, reflecting a psychological insight. This gives his poems a universal aspect as they, through displacement, become symbolically representative of a human phenomenon rather than being

²⁴ Morris, p. 98.

²⁵ Freud, “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gradiva*”, p. 58.

restrictively applicable to an individual consciousness. As Rosenberg described it, artistic creation produces a “limitless idea, responsive to the emotion but ungraspable by the intellect,” (*CW*, lecture on *Art*, 291); in other words, the idea is not related to a single individual consciousness, but is a representative general description of human consciousness. Related to this interpretation of responsiveness to the emotion and ungraspability by the intellect is that the ‘idea’ is displaced in a way that satisfies the unconscious without any collision with the superego. Here one may refer to the primitive basis of metaphoric and figurative language which Robert Gordis described as an act where “instead of calling a thing or act directly by name, we replace it by an epithet or comparison that suggests it without naming it.”²⁷ Freud studied ‘primal words’ in relation to his science, asserting that one way in which ‘association’ and ‘displacement’ work is manifested in primitive language where certain words have ‘antithetical meanings’, “combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing”, by means of a sense of negative presence or binary opposition: “any element that admits of a contrary is a present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or as a negative.”²⁸

Rosenberg’s unfinished fragment, “Wild Undertones”, written in 1914, is a clear statement of the connection between the work of art and the creator’s unconscious:

I wash my soul in colours, in a million undertones,
And then my soul shines out - and you read - a poem.

At first it seems that Rosenberg is describing his writing in terms of artistic technique, the application of a colourwash to a canvas; yet there is also the suggestion here that amid the ‘undertones’ are a ‘million’ suppressed desires dwelling in the unconscious. Rosenberg saw such implicature as a necessity of his own poetry, and as the defining characteristic of all ‘great’ poetry, which, he wrote, should be based on “suggestiveness, mystery, vagueness, [and] something underlying what is actually put down.” (*CW*, 302). That phrase ‘put down’ is itself

²⁶ Morris, p. 98.

²⁷ Robert Gordis, *The Word and the Book: Studies in Biblical Language and Literature* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1976), p. 149.

²⁸ Freud “The Antithetical Meanings of Primal Words” in *SE*, vol. 11, p. 155.

suggestive, for in describing the execution of great writing, Rosenberg employs a phrase used to denote 'killing', usually of animals. Furthermore, one might say that by talking about what lies behind his thoughts, the poet is asserting his own personality; however, this does not contradict Rosenberg's aim of being read, understood and appreciated as a poet, since it urges the reader to search for the 'hidden'.

But this also draws attention to an essential aspect of Rosenberg's Freudian psychology which seems to go beyond the psychoanalyst's speculations about the individual's behaviour. Harold Bloom has built, on Freudian concepts, his theory of Influence, poetic repression and revision of precursor sources of imaginative and poetic excellence and authority within the psyche of each poet; hence he has developed out of Freud's science a psychological literary critical approach which accounts for the act of composing poetry.²⁹ Rosenberg's poetry can be read as a skilful engagement with precursor poets, a repression of past traditions, an 'introjection' of the superego of literary tradition, in an attempt to assert his own literary identity as opposed to the 'other'..

In fact, Freudian psychoanalysis asserts the act of concealment is a central element in human nature. It was seen earlier how a grown-up would rather confess a misdeed than reveal a phantasy; Freud himself said that "one always keep one's mouth shut about the most intimate things."³⁰ Rosenberg also once said: "Very few people say what they mean, though they may say what they think." (*CW*, 302). This is also central in Freud's considering Goethe as one of his heroes: "not only was he a great revealer, but he was also, despite the wealth of autobiographical hints, a careful concealer."³¹ Rosenberg read and admired Goethe, finding a similar autobiographical note in his writings and appreciating him as such, in a letter to Miss Seaton in 1915 he wrote: "It is the most interesting autobiography I've ever read. It

²⁹The relation between Bloom and Freud is reflected in the earlier's miscellaneous references to Freud; it is argued in Peter de Bolla, *Harold Bloom: Towards Historical Rhetorics* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 19-21; 81-4; see also Graham Allen, *Harold Bloom: Aspects of Conflict* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp. 6-9; 22-5; 150-62.

³⁰ A Letter to Fliess, 3:12:1897 (no. 77), *Origins*, p. 236.

is as much like an autobiography of Shakespeare as one could be. He is the most comprehensive of writers since Shakespeare.” (*CW*, 209).³²

The ‘Hidden’ then alludes to Freudian repression which thus suggests an inner civil war in the individual’s psyche, as revealed in condensed and displaced memories and dreams which Rosenberg calls the ‘conquering ghosts’ in “The Dead Past”, and “The ghosts of all the hours” in “A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory”. Jews, Harold Bloom says, “are urged by their tradition to remember, but very selectively”.³³ Thus when he invites the Jews to ‘Awake’ in “Ode to David’s Harp”, Rosenberg is urging them to remember and specifically, to recall David and Judah. Tellingly, these two figures of the Jewish past lie in Israel’s breast when the poet’s invitation is meant “To wake the zeal in Israel’s breast”. While the invitation is a request for remembering, the place of the ‘to-be-remembered’, in terms of the Jewish past and land, invokes Freudian repression. In addition, in “Zion” the poet recalls the past and implicitly asks the Jews to do the same, as he says that the city “fell,/ And only left her story”. One might say that in mentioning Zion the ideas of displacement and suggestiveness fail. However, Zion is used here allegorically as a symbol for any repressed forgotten past. Like the image of exile, it is used here as a universal symbol, as will be further explained later.

The importance of the past and memory is central in “Past Days Are Hieroglyphs”:

Past days are hieroglyphs
Scrawled behind the brows
Scarred deep with iron blows,
Upon the thundered tree
Of memory.

(lines 1-5)

³¹ ‘Address delivered to the Goethe House at Frankfort’ (1930), quoted by Kris in *Origins*, p. 237, note 3.

³² The English version of Goethe’s autobiography Rosenberg probably read is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Auto-Biography of Goethe: Truth and Poetry From My Own Life*, trans. John Oxenford (London : H. G. Bohn, 1848-49).

³³ Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truth: Poetry and Belief From the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), p. 145.

Not only is it that memory recalls the past; it is rather that what is recalled is the suppressed past as evident in “Scarred deep with iron blows”, a suggestion of Freudian repression and memory. ‘Iron’ has connotations to a Jewish blacksmith and it also alludes to an industrial society; significant is a conflict between such symbolic ‘iron’ and the pastoral nature of memory implied in ‘tree of memory’. It seems as if the industrial world in which Rosenberg lived impedes and destroys memory. This is also evident in the idea of “Scrawled behind the brows” where a sense of repression is suggested. The association between language, hieroglyphic writing, and psychological perceptions of past memories is telling. Freud studied the relation between language and psychoanalysis and even referred to “hieroglyphic inscriptions,” suggesting that language uncovers a wealth of psychological traits of the speaker, and asserting that:

we psychiatrists cannot escape the suspicion that we should be better at understanding and translating the language of dreams, if we know more about the development of language.³⁴

In dreams, or in memories, Freud asserts, language is psychologically significant, a proposition evident in Rosenberg’s lines.

In fact this relates to the image of the poet as an agent of spiritual rebirth, and poetry as a release of unconscious desires, like dreams. In “Aspiration” the poet claims to be able to approach and touch the suppressed:

Other ears shall wait my shadow, - can you see behind the
brows?
For I would see with mine own eyes the glory and the gold.
With a strange and fervid vision see the glamour and the dream.
And chant on incantation in a measure new and bold,
And enaureole a glory round an unawaken’d theme.

(Lines: 12-6)

³⁴ Freud “the Antithetical Meanings of Primal Words”, pp. 156; 161; Freud’s idea of consciousness, he finds, is represented in primitive words with antithetical meanings the speaker’s use of which enables him/her to suggest one and claim to intend the opposite meaning, hence responding to the unconscious and to the laws of the superego altogether. The matter can be seen in suggestive language.

In his aspiration to rouse the 'unawaken'd theme', Rosenberg has recourse to a new coinage, 'enaureole', derived from his experience of aureoles, those staple devices of Quattrocento painting, denoting the golden rewards of holiness and virtue. The idea of 'see behind the brows' hence suggests looking beyond the forehead at the aureole, but may also indicate that the poem is a response to the unconscious, achieved through the poet's ability to cross the boundaries of the conscious; that is, he can see 'the dream' and awaken an unconscious 'theme'.

As for dreams, Rosenberg's poetry is dominated by images of dreams as frames for releasing repressed past desires that are stored in the unconscious. The idea of memory in "A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory" is accompanied by the idea of dreams:

And Time leads Life through many waste places,
And dreams and shapes of death.

(Lines: 48-9)

Tallett suggested that "the idea of 'waste places' echoes Freud's theory that fragments of experience are relegated to the unconscious as a sort of waste-paper bin".³⁵ But like the previous sense of memory of the suppressed past, in "Psyche's Lament" Rosenberg takes dreams to reflect the same act of remembering: "Yet seems it dreams of ancient days". Dreams are also associated with desire; in "Night" the poet's sexual desire for his beloved is related to "dreams lust weaves". In fact, Rosenberg's "Sacred Voluptuous Hollows Deep" can be read as a definition of the unconscious.

Sacred, voluptuous hollows deep
Where the unlifted shadows sleep
Beneath inviolate mouth and chin.
What virginal woven mystery
Guarding some pleadful spiritual sin

³⁵ Tallett, p. 47. After saying this, Tallett abruptly moves to an unargued proposition asserting that this poem of Rosenberg includes "an Eliot-like 'Waste Land', a region beset by poets of our century." (p. 47) But she then returns to the analogy with Freud, saying that 'dreams and shapes of death' echoes the concept of the unconscious as the domain of dreams and nightmares. She then sets off to "extend this analogy", saying "the idea of the mind's 'shapes' anticipates the notion of the unconscious as a place of symbols and verbal structures... The idea is not unlike Jacques Lacan's famous axiom: 'The unconscious is structured as a language'." (p. 47) She stops at this point, moving from Freud into Eliot to Lacan, too much to be said in these few lines, and, confusing both Lacan and Freud.

So hard to traffic with or flee,
Lies in your chaste impurity?

(Lines: 1-7)

He describes a 'mysterious', 'deep' place in which 'spiritual sin' lives in impurity.³⁶ As it is sketched out in these lines, it is a zone of negative energies which give life to the prefixes: 'unlifted' and 'inviolable'. This place can be considered as the unconscious where man's primitive, socially-sinful, desires are imprisoned. But these desires become 'roots' for the thought that will express them after camouflaging their sinful nature, modifying them to conform to the laws of the superego:

Where our thoughts nestle, our lithe limbs
Frenzied exult till vision swims
In fierce delicious agonies;

(Lines: 10-2)

Thus, the thought that is uttered in words is rooted in primitive desires, for the release of which the poem provides a suitable frame:

O read - read what my pale mouth tells.
God! Could that mouth be but the air
To kiss your chasteness everywhere
Bound with lust's shrivelling manacles!

(Lines: 21-4)³⁷

In fact, the 'voluptuous' and 'deep' hollows to which the persona refers, in association with 'virginal woven mystery' as well as ideas of 'sin', 'chaste' and 'impurity', can be an implicit reference to female sexual organs, which seem to be dominating the persona's mind; hence the poem becomes the substituting phantasy for the 'vision' of the female's sexual organ, which is described as 'manacles'

³⁶ The poem recalls Tennyson's "Maud" where the idea of hollow, death, burial and a mysterious place where sin hides, is evident:

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,
The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,
And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers 'Death.' (Lines: 1-4).

³⁷ The last line possibly alludes to Blake's "London": "The mind-forg'd manacles I hear" (line: 8), and hence suggests that the 'hollow' in Rosenberg's poem is the modern city, perhaps even London, where civilisation is a vale hiding sin and crime, just in relation to Blake's "Chimney-sweepers cry, blackening Church appalls, blood down Palace walls, youthful Harlots curse and the new-born Infants tear".

controlling the persona's mind. The poem's implicit imagery turns out to be the conscious way of neutralising the pressures of the unconscious repressed sexual desire. Access to the unconscious becomes possible through reading the poem which in itself turns out to be the unconscious written and defined. That is, the poem provides a legitimate means for the buried and suppressed to be unearthed and released. Consequently, Rosenberg's themes of rebirth, memory and dreams reflect his awareness of the psychological world of humanity, an awareness that parallels Freudian perception as represented in the idea of the unconscious.

A further aspect of such modern psychological perception lies in the idea of the unchronological time. In "What May Be, What Hath Been And What Is Now", the title reflects a lack of chronology, which was earlier interpreted, in connection with Rosenberg's Zionism, as a means of asserting the dominance of the present. It can be added here that it also alludes to what in Freudian psychoanalysis is called the '*stream of consciousness*' as a new view of time, not as a series of chronological moments, but as a continuous flow in the consciousness of the individual with a mixture of past, present and future.³⁸ This is also evident in Rosenberg's ideas about memory and rebirth where the past is found to be influential on one's present actions and reactions.

The stream of consciousness is strongly related to the idea of association, for it stresses the association of ideas within the individual's consciousness. Rosenberg saw the work of art as a collection of such associated ideas: "we have subtle but intelligible symbols to correspond to the most delicate and imperceptible shade of emotion; and it is by bringing these varied symbols into a coherent unity that a work of art is constructed." (*CW*, 290) The link that connects these varied symbols is not chronology but rather is the central idea between them; that is, association. In other words, they are linked by a unifying 'wish', Rosenberg's 'most delicate and imperceptible shade of emotion'. As suggested earlier, Rosenberg described the idea as 'responsive to the emotions but ungraspable by the intellect', which may mean that the relation between the ideas and the emotions is something particular to each

³⁸. For Freud's relation to this see Melvin J. Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1955), pp. 99-120; Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954).

individual consciousness and, thus, is not subject to an intellectual generalisation. This is what modern Freudian psychoanalysis asserts: consciousness is unique and individual. In claiming the sources of an individual's phantasy are rooted in the individual's own childhood, Freud emphasised that the motivations for phantasy "vary according to the sex, character and circumstances of the person who is having the phantasy," though they generally fall under two categories: ambitious wishes to elevate and fulfil the subject's personality, or erotic ones.³⁹ He asserted that phantasies should not be considered 'stereotypical or unalterable' for "on the contrary, they fit themselves in to the subject's impression of life, change with every change in his situation, and receive from every fresh active impression what might be called a 'date mark'."⁴⁰ Freud added at the same place that "the relation of phantasy to time is in general very important" in the sense that "past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them," because "the wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future."⁴¹ This is exactly what the persona asserts in "The Dead Past": "The past is the future and you and the future are we". In rejecting chronology the need for an alternative means of achieving movement in the work of literature arises. Rosenberg suggested the solution saying that "this is brought about through movement, the rapid succession of images and thought, as in nature itself." (*CW*, lecture on *Art*, 291) He does not mention chronology. Movement is basically brought about through 'association'; and Rosenberg argued that "we can never strip ourselves from associated ideas." (*CW*, lecture on *Art*, 294) The association between these ideas is particular to the poet who writes or the reader who responds, each in his own way. Hence, on one level, Rosenberg's poetry has a psychological insight that has a general applicability; on the other, it is particular to its creator's self, Rosenberg himself, as a Jew and a poet.

³⁹ Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming", pp. 146-7

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.147.

'Moses must die to live in Christ'

One possible source through which Rosenberg might have encountered Freudian ideas could be through Dr. David Eder, who "was one of the first in England to put Freud's theories into practice."⁴² Eder was a cousin of Israel Zangwill with whom he lived. Rosenberg mentioned Eder in a letter to Miss Seaton in 1911: "Dr. Eder told me he [F. S. Flint] was very young, about 22; and I expect he'll do something yet." (*CW*, 184). In another letter to Miss Seaton in the same year, Rosenberg reported receiving a letter from Eder including criticism of Rosenberg's poetry, which Rosenberg quoted: "You have the artist's feeling for expression and for words. I should say you have not yet developed your own technique. This is not meant as a fault - [to] the contrary. But there is a fault. And that is, you have so far not given utterance to your own personality..." (*CW*, 187). Eder was "a pioneer Freudian in England. Rosenberg met him early in 1911, probably in Amschewitz's studio".⁴³ In fact, Amschewitz asserted that "it was in my studio that he [Rosenberg] met most of the friends that figure in this book [*The Collected Works*] and who influenced his life - the late Dr. Eder...."⁴⁴ During the war no correspondence between Eder and Rosenberg had taken place, possibly because the former was in Malta and the latter was in France. Thus it is likely that Eder did not discuss with Rosenberg the research he was undertaking for his seminal *War-Shock: The Psycho-Neuroses in War Psychology and Treatment* as it deals with the Great War during which Eder's and Rosenberg's contacts seem to have been severed.⁴⁵ Eder's book deals with the psychological impact of war on the soldiers in terms of "exhaustion, mental and physical; depression, pressure on the head..."⁴⁶ Freud's influence on the book is evident and Eder acknowledges that "I

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 147-8.

⁴² See Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: Poet and Painter* (London: Cecil and Woolf, 1975), p. 83.

⁴³ Ian Parsons (ed.), *The Collected Works Of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), p. 184.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Liddiard, p. 60; originally from J. H. Amschewitz, Lecture given in South Africa, reported in *The Zionist Record*, 27 November 1936.

⁴⁵ David Montague Eder, *War-Shock: The Psycho-Neuroses in War Psychology and Treatment* (London: William Heinmann Ltd., 1917), impr. 1918.

have followed Freud".⁴⁷ However, Eder also refers to Carl Jung; he says that "I have been tempted to follow him [Jung]", which perhaps supports Tallett's claim that Rosenberg was influenced by Jungian Psychology which he received from Dr. Eder.⁴⁸ Given the fact that Rosenberg, as discussed earlier, surrounded himself with art and had a habit of frequently breaking his friendships, it is possible that he did not discuss a great deal of Freudian psychology with Eder. In addition, Rosenberg acknowledged reading many poets and authors without a single reference to Freud. The parallels with Freud are also wider than Rosenberg and Eder could have discussed in a short period. Nonetheless, correspondence between Eder and Rosenberg, as evident in the previous two references to Eder in Rosenberg's letters, was more concerned with poetry than with Freud and such correspondence was in an early stage in 1911, when such poems of Rosenberg as "My Days" and "The Dead Past" were written by then.

While the parallels between Freud and Rosenberg are many and close, there is no evidence to say categorically that Rosenberg echoes Freud at any given point. Besides, however close each one of them is to the other at times, they are often closer to the experience of the modern Jew, with Jewish backgrounds and roots, living in the West and experiencing the years of the assimilation. The parallels between the two may hence be partly explained by the influence of such a shared Jewish background on each and each other's work. It is asserted that Freud's psychoanalysis is strongly rooted in his Jewishness.⁴⁹ Indeed, Bloom's account of the Jewish essence of Freud's psychoanalysis has always been needed for a better understanding of the science of the mind. Paul Roazen alleged that "while godless, Freud was very much a Jew", so that "since Freud's Jewishness is one of the less explored aspects of his character, our knowledge of psychoanalysis is proportionately deficient."⁵⁰ J. N. Isbister emphasised the crucial role the Jewish

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 8; for other references to Freud see pp. 44; 95; 114.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 10; for similar references to Jung see pp. 67; 92; 116; 119. For Tallett see pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹ See Bloom; see also William McGrath, "How Jewish Was Freud?" in *The New York Review of Books*, December 5, 1991, pp. 27-31; and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991).

background had on Freud's work and life saying that "the influence of Judaism is by no means external to the development and course of his scientific work."⁵¹ While Freud is considered to have personally hated the past, he is also believed to have transformed this hatred into his therapeutic psychoanalysis.⁵² Bloom asserted that:

if there is something ineluctably Jewish about this transformation, then perhaps we can take it as a synecdoche for all the Jewish metamorphosis of exile into achievement. The wandering people has taught itself and others the lesson of wandering meaning, a wandering that compelled a multitude of changes with the modes of interpretation available to the West.⁵³

The same can be said of Rosenberg who found in exile a metaphoric expression of the Jewish desire for change and achievement. He saw that in terms of the theme of rebirth which became for him a parable of the Jewish struggle, under repression, to satisfy their suppressed desire for independent identity. Indeed, the way he employs the archetypal rebirth pattern relates to the conditions of exile and becomes symbolic of the people who suffer from it. It symbolises the suppression of desire for independent identity in the unconscious and its revival in metaphoric conscious representations. Bodkin described how the rebirth pattern in poetry reflects "in Jung's terms - 'a translation of the primordial image into the language of the present,' through its gathering into simultaneity of impression images from the remote past with incidents and phrases of the everyday present."⁵⁴ Metaphoric rebirth is then a sort of 'dream' or 'memory' in the sense of being a frame for releasing in conscious manners what is suppressed in the unconscious. The previous Jungian terms show that memory of past incidents is activated by and rendered in light of present motivating incidents. Indeed, this has explicitly been stated by Freud:

⁵⁰ Paul Roazen, *Freud: Political and Social Thought* (London: Hogarth Press, 1969), pp. 126-27.

⁵¹ J. N. Isbister, *Freud: An Introduction to His Life And Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p. 13.

⁵² Bloom, p. 145.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-6.

⁵⁴ Bodkin, p. 308.

it might... be conjectured that what had remained in memory was the most significant element in the whole period of life, whether it had possessed such importance at the time, or it had gained subsequent importance from the influence of later events.

The high value of such childish recollections was, it is true... that they were related to some other unmistakably important experiences.⁵⁵

Rosenberg's ideas of the 'dead past' and 'buried hours', discussed so far, reveal a psychological insight that shows an understanding of the place memory and 'past' have in the human psyche, which Rosenberg interprets and explains in a way similar to Freud's idea of the unconscious. Interpretation, as an act of defining and explaining the mysterious, recondite and difficult, as well as redefining it by rejecting existing explanations and accounts of it, is central for both Rosenberg and Freud as they attempt to explain aspects of the human psyche. Their attempts belong to a conscious attitude of mind that seeks an understanding which can only be achieved through distinctive powers. There basically needs to be a level of freedom from the pressures of one's own repressed desires, to be able to consciously express them. Bloom claimed that this freedom is possessed by "a few elite individuals strong enough to bear their own freedom".⁵⁶ It is this freedom that enables the individual to interpret the muddled and equivocal, the inner human world. It is the ability to see within, not without, to 'see behind the brows'. In other words, it is the freedom to analyse the human mind.

Rosenberg often asserted that he was preoccupied with such analysis. Earlier in his life he alluded to such interest, saying "Yea, world on world is forming in my brain" ("Raphael"). In "Aspiration", one of the poems associated with the theme of the poet and his vocation, in which the poet is considered able 'to see behind the brows', he announces that "The roots of a dead universe are shrunken in my brain". The words he utters spring from his analysis of the mind: "Blown words, whose root is the brain", he says in "Who Loses the Hour of Wind". And when he describes how he sees the modern soldier, whom he takes to be a 'great new Titan' who

⁵⁵ Freud "A Childhood Recollection from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*", *SE*, vol. 17, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Bloom, p. 145.

challenges history and tradition, he portrays him as “a word in the brain’s ways”. (in “Soldier: Twentieth Century” and “Girl To A Soldier On Leave”). This new seeing entails a need for an unusual eye which for Rosenberg becomes “the living eyes underneath” and the “strong eyes”. (*Moses*, lines 61 and 64; the image also recurs in other places such as “Through These Pale Cold Days”). “Freud’s extraordinary ambition”, said Bloom, “is to seek to explain nothing less than the origins of thinking, indeed of thinking as a relatively free process.”⁵⁷ Consequently, Freud and Rosenberg were interested in an interpretation based on inward seeing.

Rosenberg’s interest in “Mak[ing] music with the bones of death”, (“Creation”) in the sense that ‘making music’ is an act of breaking the silence of ignorance and ‘the bones of death’ being the realm of the suppressed past and the unconscious is similar to Freud’s interest in interpreting the origins of thought and accounting for the inner psychic interactions in the mind. This relates to the image of the archaeologist discussed earlier. Rosenberg asserted the need for freedom: “Religious freedom, freedom of thought, has prepared the way for heights of daring and speculation.” (*CW*, 301) And it is argued that psychoanalysis is speculation rather than science, philosophy, or religion.⁵⁸ Freud also “felt that his mission was to effect the final blow to any vestiges of self-pretension to divinity that humanity might still bear,” when pretension is a sort of being mentally controlled.⁵⁹ Because Freud’s interpretation, like Rosenberg’s, targets the ‘inner’ and ‘interior’, Bloom associated it with the “the rabbinical procedures of unpacking the Torah. ‘Turn it and turn it for everything is in it’ the sage Ben Bag Bag remarks of Torah in *Prike Abot*.”⁶⁰ He explained that rabbinical memory “insists that all meanings are present in the Bible... If everything is there already, then everything in the Bible is meaningful.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

⁵⁸ Isbister, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Bloom, p. 146.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 147.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 152.

Furthermore, the association between memory and interpretation is another Jewish dimension. "Freudian memory is Jewish" and, Bloom added, Jewish emphasis on remembering appears because "the Jewish God is primarily 'God of your fathers the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,' known through historical self-revelations."⁶² Jewish, and Freudian, interpretation targets the present in light of the past, an allusion to the rabbinical tradition for "Freud, like the rabbis, had placed everything in the past," when Freud's "most profound Jewishness, voluntary and involuntary, was his consuming passion for interpretation."⁶³ Rosenberg's case is similar as his ideas about dreams, memory and rebirth show. The sense of 'passion' alludes to the interpreter's personality. Both Rosenberg and Freud had an interest in drawing a map for the mind, but in different styles. James Strachey highlighted the relation between Freud's science and his interest in satisfying a personal desire for knowledge.⁶⁴ He quoted Freud saying:

I have no knowledge of having had any craving in my early childhood to help suffering humanity... In my youth I felt an overpowering need to understand something of the riddles of the world in which we live and perhaps even to contribute something to their solution.⁶⁵

The act of interpretation turns out to have subjective aspects because it is interpreter-bound, reflecting the interpreter's own 'ambivalence'. Ambivalence has a sense of anxiety which makes it an act of reconstructing subjectivity in relation to objectivity. That is, the act of interpreting is a conscious response to repressed desires under the necessity of adapting and modifying them so as to find ways of satisfying them in the real outward world. Here the oppressor's authority is internalised as the super ego, an inner supervisor of outward social prohibition. Ambivalence in the sense of a complexity of love/ hate relation with the oppressor, and, thus, in the sense of Freudian introjection and projection, entails that interpretation means an act of reproduction where the dissatisfaction with (hatred of)

⁶² Ibid., pp. 152; 48.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 147; 166.

⁶⁴ James Strachey, in a biographical introduction to Freud, *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo Davinci and Other Works*, General ed. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1985), vol. 14, ed. Albert Dickson, p. 245.

⁶⁵ Quoted by Strachey in Ibid., p. 12.

the oppressor is manipulated in accordance with the rules of the oppressor internalised now as the superego. Reproduction carries a sense of both acceptance and rejection of the 'reproduced'. The question that arises here is that if Freud was reproducing a 'dead' Judaism, could it be that he was reflecting his own ambivalence (love/ hate) towards what he was reproducing? And if this was the case with Freud, did Rosenberg then parallel this attitude?

In providing a special preface for the Hebrew version of *Totem and Taboo*, Freud, Bloom claimed, wanted "to affirm the inward Jewishness of his science, and to hint even that he might be forming a Judaism for the future."⁶⁶ Bloom also asserted that Freud (and Kafka) did not want to "become Jewish culture, but who... redefined that culture for us."⁶⁷ Redefinition is itself the idea of reproduction, for redefinition entails a new understanding which, nevertheless, hints at the subjectivity of the 'redefiner'. And redefinition also suggests the rejection of earlier interpretations, changing or developing them. This also implies that what is reproduced is at first internalised (introjected and repressed) and then projected anew. Freud reduced "all love to love of authority or of the father, whom [he] identified ultimately with the Jewish God."⁶⁸ In other words, he "reduced all religion to longing for the father."⁶⁹

Rosenberg fiercely rebelled against such an orthodox perception of God. His revolt springs from the suffering of the exile, accusing God of imposing unjust 'partial' fate on him. ("Love To Be") God is even depicted as bereft in "Walk You In Music, Light, or Night"; "God can only neither read nor hear" while man, perhaps the poet, is mightier:

Ah men, ye are so skilled to write
This doom so dark in letters bright.
But how can God read human fear
Who cannot dry a human tear?

(lines 4-7)

⁶⁶ Bloom, p. 153.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

The shortcomings of Rosenberg's God are associated with blindness in "The Blind God", suggesting His inability to analyse, interpret and explain, in contradistinction to the poet who can see 'behind the brows', a metaphor for the ability to analyse the hidden, muddled, and mysterious. The process of challenging Providence shows how Rosenberg internalises this figure of authority and then defies him. In "God" the persona associates God with a 'malodorous brain' and 'oblique eyes', both suggesting a diminished intellectuality which thus makes God appear as "an old shrunk power". It is at this point that the persona overcomes fear of death for it appears to him that it is a trick of a powerless god: "Is but his cunning to make death more hard." The persona concludes: "Ah! this miasma of a rotting God!"

This ability to overcome fear of death as part of the revolt against god parallels a major aspect of Freud's rejection of religion. Freud investigated the influence of war on man's attitude toward death, showing how man's fear of death became a basis for religious success through the creation of a desirable substitute of the so-called 'afterlife', and thus "reducing the life which is ended by death to a mere preparation."⁷⁰ He even tried to account for the primitive aspect on the basis of which religion persuades humans of this particular issue, saying that it is based on a duality of acknowledging death when it comes to enemies and rejecting it when it relates to those whom we love.⁷¹ Freud wondered:

Would it not be better to give death the place in reality and in our thoughts which is its due?... To tolerate life remains, after all, the first duty of all living beings. Illusion becomes valueless if it makes this harder for us.

We recall the old saying: *si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want to preserve peace, arm for war.

It would be in keeping with the times to alter it: *si vis vitam, para mortem*. If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death.⁷²

⁷⁰ Freud, "Thoughts on War and Death", *SE*, vol. 14, pp. 295.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 297-9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300

And in his poetry Rosenberg seems to adopt such a realistic acceptance of death:

Death waits for me - ah! who shall kiss me first?
 ... Death's gift is best not worst.
 For even the honey on life's lips is curst.
 And the worm cankers in the ripest bloom.

"Death" (lines: 1-6)

Although the persona here desires death because of the sorrow and cunning found in life, he seems to consider death a reality. Nevertheless, this seems to reflect on conventional notions of love, through the echo of Shakespeare's "And Loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud." "Sonnet 35". Unlike the conventional lover's arguments with his beloved, calling her to approve of his appeals to enjoy her physical beauty before it fades away and she dies, for she is mortal, the persona here is not afraid of the passage of time, mortality and death. This can be also seen in "We Are Sad With a Vague Sweet Sorrow":

A flower that weeps to a flower
 The old tale that beauty dies

(Lines 3-4)

Conventional emphasis on the mortality of feminine beauty is simply an old fashioned and worn out cliché: 'old'. It is also associated with cunning and meanness in *Moses*: "Is but his cunning to make death more hard/ Your iron sinews take more pain in breaking." (Lines 349-50), which also recurs in the poem "God" (Lines 12-3)

Nevertheless, this perception has significant parallels with Freud's writings on the idea of 'transience' about which he thought while in the company of a poet, enjoying a scene of beautiful landscape when the poet was disturbed by the thought that all such beauty "was fated to extinction".⁷³ Freud's view of mortality differed from his friend the poet's: "But I did dispute the pessimistic poet's view that the transience of what is beautiful involves any loss of its work."⁷⁴ Freud, like Rosenberg, believed in 'rebirth':

⁷³ Freud, "On Transience" in *SE*, vol. 14, p. 305.

It was incomprehensible, I declared, that the thought of the transience of beauty should interfere with our joy in it. As regards the beauty on Nature, each time it is destroyed by winter it comes again next year, so that in relation to the length of our lives it can in fact be regarded as eternal. The beauty of the human form and face vanish for ever in the course of our lives, but their evanescence only lends them a fresh charm. A flower that blossoms only for a single night does not seem to us on that account less lovely... since the value of all this beauty and perfection is determined only by its significance for our own emotional lives, it has no need to survive us and is therefore independent of absolute duration.⁷⁵

Hence, to both Freud and Rosenberg, or at least in their writings, death and mortality are less, or even not, terrible. The attitude of exploiting the idea of death as a means of controlling the beloved's attitude becomes similar to the religious emphasis on death and afterlife by which fear of God controls the individual's behaviour.

In reducing religion to longing for the father, Freud was considered to have been preparing for his own meditations to become a new religion, a surrogate; this is evident in *Moses and Monotheism* where, Bloom argued:

The Yahwist is so revised as to vanish, and Moses is declared to be an Egyptian, Yahwisism thus becoming an Egyptian invention. Freud's motives were at least double: to revitalise the outrageous primal history scene of *Totem and Taboo*, and to remove a major rival for authenticity. It is worth remarking that Freud eagerly speculated, at just this time, that the Earl of Oxford had written Shakespeare, a curious devaluation of yet another true rival.⁷⁶

Richard Anderson asserted that there are parallels between Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and Rosenberg's play *Moses*, suggesting that Rosenberg's characterisation of Moses has striking affinities with Freud's meditations on Moses's Egyptian and historic rather than Jewish and Biblical identity.⁷⁷ Rosenberg's association of Moses with 'hot temper', as in killing Abinoah, is essential in relation to what Freud considered a "characteristic of a historical Moses."⁷⁸ Freud's

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 305.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 305-6.

⁷⁶ Bloom, p. 153.

⁷⁷ Richard Anderson, "Isaac Rosenberg - A critical Study of his Plays and Poems", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Leicester, 1975, pp. 322ff.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 324.

hypothesis that Moses is an Egyptian transformed to a Jew by Judaic myth to overcome the controversial reference to him as 'slow of speech' is, Anderson argued, paralleled in Rosenberg's description of Moses as having 'halt tongue' (*Moses*, line 248).⁷⁹ Furthermore, Rosenberg's Moses's desire to liberate the Jews from the 'imperial' Egyptians and then become their leader is compared to Freud's meditations that the Biblical Moses's appointment of himself as a leader is a sign of autocracy in the sense of attacking the enemies and at the same time adopting their method of ruling, which occurs in the context of Freud's association of imperialistic rule and the growth of monotheistic forms of religion; hence Rosenberg is considered to be paralleling "Freud's theory that Moses sets out to identify himself with God."⁸⁰ Anderson concluded that coincident parallels between Rosenberg and Freud revealed the consistent and credible relationship of the earlier's thought to early twentieth century domineering type of psychological theories, a conclusion that asserts the laconic and seminal nature of Anderson's study for he did not extend the parallels between Freud and Rosenberg to account for his conclusion.⁸¹

Freud's devaluation of rivals targeted not only Jewish religious figures, but also Christian ones.

His account of Saint Paul then internalises this superego further through the concept of the original sin, thus setting up Christianity as the religion of the son against the Judaism as the religion of the father . . . Christian anti-Semitism ... is exposed as a polytheistic rebellion against the triumph of the Mosaic and so Jewish superego.⁸²

This can be seen in relation to Rosenberg's exploitation of the Myth of the Wandering Jew which alludes to a Christian Oedipal complex, as discussed earlier. It might be of value here to recall Freud's account of mythology; he asserted that myths are "distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity."⁸³ The Wandering Jew becomes, then, an anti-

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 324-5.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 325.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 326.

⁸² Bloom, p. 159.

⁸³ Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming", p. 152.

Semitic Gentile phantasy. Rosenberg represents the relation between Judaism and Christianity in the same manner as Freud:

Moses must die to live in Christ,
The seed be buried to live to green.
Perfection must begin from worst.

“Creation” (Lines: 33-5)

This manner is the essence of his complex idea of “Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct”, (*Moses*, line 457) where unreasoned reason parallels Freud’s idea of the projection of the ‘suppressed’ in accordance with the laws of the superego. ‘Unreasoned reason’ designates desire, ‘savage instinct’, which is released in a crude manner, without being channelled in a way that suits the rules of the superego, hence ‘unreasoned’. But there is possibly a comment on Christianity being a crude revolt against Judaism, a ‘savage’ attitude.

Rosenberg’s attack against the Jewish God left him with the Christian one, whom he depicted as “The Female God”. Tallett tackled Rosenberg’s perception of femininity, arguing that he adopted “an archetypal feminine principle”, by which the female appears as “a source of wisdom,” and even as a ‘shelter’ and ‘haven’.⁸⁴ However, Tallett also found an “underlying idea of threat” in “The Female God”, but she did not recognise the discrepancy attached to such a feminine idea of God, where the desired image of wisdom and protection is compromised by a counter sense of threat.⁸⁵ This is clear in the poem where the female god appears seductive, usurper and disguised:

We curl into your eyes.
They drink our fires and have never drained.
In the fierce forest of your hair
Our desires beat blindly for their treasure.

(Lines: 1-4)

The image of ‘never drained’ suggests the persona’s long history of disappointment by a female whose eyes have never shed any tears. The image of the ‘forest of hair’

⁸⁴ Tallett, pp. 24; 23; 84.

alludes to the persona's confusion - a proposition the adverb 'blindly' supports - a confusion in not being able to figure out the reality of the female figure. This type of deity appears as "Queen, Goddess, animal", alluding to a disguised character which Jon Silkin described as "wearing pleasurable disguise".⁸⁶ Silkin's interpretation of the female god is also paradoxical; arguing that she is "superior to the male;"⁸⁷ superiority turns out to be a 'fatal' attribute since the male is 'usurpable', and the "pain inflicted... by a Goddess... becomes a necessary suffering."⁸⁸ The male god is even victimised by her:

You have dethroned the ancient God.
 You have usurped his sabbath, his common days,
 Yea! every moment is delivered to you.

(Lines: 17-9)

Then the female god is Christianity which dethrones Judaism. 'Yea', Tallett argued, suggests a "sacrificial element."⁸⁹ The confusing, seductive, disguised, false nature of Christianity, as Rosenberg saw it, is reflected in the title where instead of saying a 'goddess', he uses the title 'Female God', denoting a god who claims sentimental feminine nature, but proves to have a rather destructive masculine attitude. In this sense, the attack against Christianity is harsher than that against Judaism. The idea of the 'female god' is a comment on the different nature of God in the New Testament where, unlike the Old Testament masculine God who is more ruled by the animus, the Christian God assumes a feminine attitude as being more ruled by the anima. Again here he parallels Freud who attacked both religions but with a harsher attack against Christianity. Freud often asserted his Jewishness: "my parents were Jews; and I have remained a Jew myself."⁹⁰ And in referring to his future marriage he said:

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

⁸⁶ Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), p. 293.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 292.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 291.

⁸⁹ Tallett, p. 86.

⁹⁰ Freud, "An Autobiographical Study", in *SE*, vol. 20, p. 7.

And as for us [he and his fiancée], this is what I believe: even if the form wherein the old Jews were happy no longer offers us any shelter, something of the core, of the essence of this meaningful and life-affirming, Judaism will not be absent from our home.⁹¹

In the previous chapter on Rosenberg's Zionism, it was stated that his Jewish sensibility, which may collide with his revolt against the Jewish God, was at times aroused by anti-Semitism. Freud's Jewish sensibility, which also collides with his revolt against religion, had the same catalyst: anti-Semitism. Racial discrimination against the Jew contributed towards his proud emphasis on being a Jew. Isbister discusses an incident, reported to Freud by his father, which came to have a great influence on Freud later and thus may "help to shed some light on Freud's eventual attacks upon Christianity."⁹² Isbister narrates:

One day Jacob was walking down the street wearing a new fur hat; 'A Christian came up to me,' he said 'and with a single blow knocked off my cap into the mud and shouted: 'Jew! get off the pavement!' Asked what happened next Jacob replied: 'I went into the roadway and picked up my cap.' When Freud was recounting the accident at the age of 43 he still recalled the shame he had felt for his father, and wrote 'I contrasted this situation with another which fitted my feelings better: the scene in which Hannibal's father... made his boy swear before the household altar to take vengeance upon the Romans. Even since that time Hannibal had had a place in my phantasies.'⁹³

The identification with Hannibal, as one of those who opposed Rome, is a major aspect of Freud's thought:

Hannibal, whom I had to resemble in these respects, had been the favourite hero of my later school days... and when in the higher classes I began to understand for the first time what it meant to belong to an alien race... To my youthful mind Hannibal and Rome symbolised the conflict between the tenacity of Jewry and the organisation of the Catholic Church.⁹⁴

⁹¹ A letter to Martha Bernays 23b7:1882 (no. 7), in *Letters Of Sigmund Freud, 1873-1939*, ed. Ernst Freud, trans. Tania and James Stern (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 39-40.

⁹² Isbister, p. 15.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 14; originally from Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams", *SE*, vol. 4, p. 197.

⁹⁴ "The Interpretation of Dreams", *SE*, vol. 4, p. 196.

This is to be linked with Freud's statement during the time of a likely Nazi invasion of Austria where he said: "I am not afraid of them [the Nazis]. Help me rather to combat my true enemy . . . [that is] Religion, the Roman Catholic Church."⁹⁵

Isbister argued that Freud had a "firm belief that it was anti-Semitism that had resulted in his not receiving academic recognition."⁹⁶ In "Civilisation and Its Discontents", Freud alluded to this:

It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurements - that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and yet they underestimate what is of true value in life... there are few men from whom their contemporaries do not withhold admiration, although their greatness rests on attributes and achievements which are completely foreign to the aims and ideals of the multitude.⁹⁷

As James Strachey puts it: "it was not only the nature of his discoveries that created prejudice against him in medical circles; just as great, perhaps, was the effect of the intense anti-semitic [*sic*] feeling which dominated the official world of Vienna."⁹⁸ And William McGrath said: "Intense anti-Semitic pressure against his advancement to a secure university position in Vienna had repeatedly taught Freud the high cost of being Jewish, and even if he were willing to bear the cost himself, he wanted to do what he could to insulate the psychoanalytic movement against it."⁹⁹ Compared to Rosenberg, Freud's recognition suffered less; his appointment as a professor is one single example of this. But Freud can offer Rosenberg more consolation in acknowledging that:

creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know of a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their

⁹⁵ Reported by Laforgne, "Personal Memories of Freud" in *Freud as We Know Him*, ed. Hendrick Ruitenbeek (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1973), p. 344.

⁹⁶ Isbister, p. 208.

⁹⁷ Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents", *SE*, vol. 21, p. 64.

⁹⁸ Strachey in Freud, *Art and Literature*, p. 15.

⁹⁹ McGrath, p. 29.

knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us every day people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science.¹⁰⁰

Though this was not addressed to Rosenberg, it might have still offered him consolation since his desire to be acknowledged as a creative writer, a poet, is never to be questioned: "I like to think of myself as a poet", he told Gordon Bottomley and added that "though I know it to be extravagant, [for thinking of this while being under serious death threats of the surrounding trench warfare] it gives me immense pleasure." (*CW*, 269)

Rosenberg was always aware of the obstacles his Jewishness placed against his recognition; it was argued earlier that Gordon Bottomley's advice that Rosenberg should "write Jewish plays" was accompanied by fear of being "boycotted and excommunicated, that is, assuming my work is understood." (*CW*, 247). This necessitated the suppression of his identity, though suppression does not deny it and rather keeps it camouflaged in his phantasies and writings. While Freud's ideas of suppression and repression have a central connection with the suppression of the Jews in exile and under the emancipation, Rosenberg's poetry reveals similar feelings of being suppressed and denied recognition. His war poems, written in the mud of Flanders, are strongest possible statements of 'living burial', war hence becoming a parable for the social circumstances of the Jew, as they were preserved in Rosenberg's unconscious. In "Break of Day in the Trenches", the soldiers are "sprawled in the bowels of the earth." (Line 17); in "Dead Man's Dump", the soldiers are pressed in the earth:

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched,
Their shut mouths made no moan.

(Lines 7-9)

Rosenberg was more detached in his treatment of the suffering of the war than the other war poets such as Owen; but how could he remain so detached as he recorded the experience of the trenches? Possibly because this was not something new to him; and so he is not as surprised as his gentile comrades. He experienced before the war

¹⁰⁰ Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", p. 8.

the conditions of living underground, which hence becomes a way of presenting the war as much as seeing the war as a manifestation of it:

Earth has waited for them
All the time of their growth
Fretting for their decay:
Now she has them at last!
In the strength of their strength
Suspended - stopped and held.
...
Earth! Have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,...

(Lines 14-22)

Like these soldiers, the suppressed Jew was 'dead and dumped'.

To conclude, Rosenberg's ideas of rebirth, memory, dreams, God, time, and power parallel Freud's psychoanalysis in theory and application. Rather than stating the influence of any of them on the other, for lack of evidence, parallels between the two are related to the fact that both have based their psychological insights on their Jewish tradition. Both hated the past and both reproduced it anew, turning the obstacle into therapeutic achievement. Both developed their speculations from the conditions of the exile. McGrath said that Freud was influenced by the anti-Semitism he encountered in Vienna so that "Freud's instinctive reaction to its [anti-Semitism] constantly increasing influence was a stubborn assertion of his Jewishness, which accounts for the many strong statements of his Jewish identity to be found particularly in his private correspondence."¹⁰¹ Thus, if for Bloom "Freud is another of the authors of the Jewish myths of exile, and Psychoanalysis becomes another parable of people always homeless or at least uneasy at space, who must seek a perpetually deferred fulfilment in time," Rosenberg is a poet of the Jewish myths of exile and his poetry is a similar parable like Freud's psychoanalysis.¹⁰² In the next chapter on Rosenberg's Orphic vision, it will be seen that Moses's attempts to stimulate a spiritual revival was intended to enable the Jews to liberate themselves from the manacles of materialism. This appears at that time as a similarity with Orpheus who, unlike Prometheus who leads people to mere rejection, enables them

¹⁰¹ McGrath, p. 29.

¹⁰² Bloom, p. 146.

to realise their spiritual death to pave the way for their self-performed metamorphosis. In this sense, Rosenberg's poetic vision parallels Freud whose "whole therapy", Roazen argued, "is aimed at liberation and independence."¹⁰³ Parallels between Freud and Rosenberg lie, on one hand, in the fact that both had similar Jewish backgrounds. Hence some of these similar thoughts will remain central in later discussions of Rosenberg's Jewishness in relation to his Orphic vision, class, critical thought and to 'tradition'. The fact that poets, as Freud acknowledged, anticipated, and still contribute, to psychoanalysis, means that such a contribution would be closer to Freud, especially when the poet was, like Freud, a modern Jew with experience of the years of assimilation.

¹⁰³ Roazen, p. 247. Roazen went further in saying that "it is therefore more than exercise to relate Freud to the liberal tradition," (p. 247) and alleged that "we can see in the development of psychoanalysis how the open-ended quality of liberalism led to a revision of some of its most cherished premises. For Freud represents an aspect of liberalism's self-examination." (p. 248) For more see pp. 246-51.

Chapter Three

In The Underworld

'The Old Prometheus'

While it is asserted that Rosenberg's mind "was full of mythological figures," and that he was an "avid reader of legend," it must be noted that he had also his own preferences and exploited the figure that best suited his preoccupations: Prometheus.¹ Allusions to Rosenberg's mythological fascinations are evident in two of his later poems, "Soldier: Twentieth Century" and "Girl to Soldier on Leave", both of which reveal an interest in a "great new Titan"; and announce the adoption of a fresh type of a mythical model.

The Titans were the twelve children of Uranus and Gaea - Oceanus, Coeus, Cirrus, Ityperion, Iapetus, Cronus and their sisters Thea, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, and Tethys - and their descendants. One of the Titans, Cronus, rebelled against his father and took over the leadership, while in time Cronus's son, Zeus, repeated his father's deed and, with the help of his brothers and sisters, became the leader of the Titans and punished those who sided with Cronus, imprisoning them in the underworld. Prometheus (the son of Iapetus and the sea nymph Clymene), was one such who eventually defied Zeus; yet in the early stages of the conflict between Zeus and the Titans over leadership and supremacy, Prometheus sided with Zeus and became his chief counsellor. However, Prometheus fell out with Zeus over the unjust distribution of a sacrificial animal between the gods and man, and when Zeus refused the proposal to permit man the gift of fire, Prometheus stole it from Heaven and returned it to Earth. Zeus punished Prometheus; in two ways; first, he created a woman, Pandora, and sent her to Earth with a box full of evils to spread among mankind; second, he chained Prometheus to a rock to be daily tortured by a vulture devouring his liver which would regenerate every night.

¹ E. O. G. Davies, "Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, Univ. of Nottingham, 1957, p. 136; V. M. R. Tallett, "Visionary and Revolutionary Impulses in the Works of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, Univ. of Leeds, 1991, p. 4.

An essential aspect of the new mythical figure in Rosenberg's poetry is rendered in association with 'The old Prometheus' who

Wanes like a ghost before your power-
His pangs were joys to yours.

"Girl to Soldier on Leave" (lines 6-8)

The second allusion to Prometheus occurs in "Soldier: Twentieth Century"; the lover's antagonists are "cruel men.../ They have stolen the sun's power"; in each case the poems oppose the 'new' Titan to the old Prometheus, whose 'age' suggests the insufficiency of this figure for Rosenberg and which, thus, demands a new substitute. Nevertheless, it is not yet clear who this substitute might be; he cannot be Prometheus, for he has assumed the role of a rejected lover.

The departure from Prometheus entails a movement towards Orpheus; as Walter A. Strauss says, "the antithesis to the Orpheus myth is the Promethean theme."² Both Prometheus and Orpheus are demi- gods and mythological "culture-heroes": the former defies Zeus in behalf of mankind and is martyred for his deeds, while the latter is... "the eternal rebel" whose attitude towards the unjust external world has different implications, for he provides an example of the individual's inner metamorphosis by reforming himself.³ The Orphic and Promethean themes are then different attitudes of social transformation which bring into consideration the role of the poet as a social reformer; a role to which Orpheus is closer for he is a poet and a musician rather than a thief. The distinction between Orpheus and Prometheus is significantly associated with the basic characteristic of each one's attitude to the universe. Therefore, before venturing into the distinction between the Promethean and Orphic themes, a rough outline of the myth of Orpheus is necessary.⁴

Orpheus, - a native of Thrace, whose father was a local king, Oeagraus, or Apollo, and whose mother was Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry - was a lyricist

² Walter A. Strauss, *Descent And Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 10; see also Herbert Marcuse, *Eros And Civilisation: a Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 162 & 171.

³ Strauss, p. 10.

possessed of powers by which all nature, animate and inanimate, was subdued. He married Eurydice, whom he lost soon after their marriage, when she was bitten by a snake. In order to rescue her from death, Orpheus set off on a journey to the underworld. Pleasing Pluto and Persephone by the power of his song, Orpheus was permitted to bring Eurydice back on condition that he would not look back at her till they cross the edge of the underworld. However, at the edge of the underworld he looked back and lost her again to return to the upper world alone. After this Orpheus discarded feminine company and was, thus, attacked by the female followers of Dionysus and torn apart.⁵ The result was that while his head floated down the river, it continued to sing and prophesy and his lyre continued to sound.

In "Soldier: Twentieth Century" Rosenberg says:

Eyes kissed by death,
Won back to the world again,
Lost and won in a breath,

(lines 6-8)

This seems an allusion to the myth of Orpheus, particularly to the death of Eurydice and to Orpheus's admission to the underworld to regain her. The last stanza in "Girl to soldier on Leave" repeats the same motif:

Love! you love me – your eyes
Have looked through death at mine.
You have tempted a grave too much.
I let you – I repine.

The girl's 'farewell' to her lover echoes the separation between Orpheus and Eurydice; the lover 'looks' at the beloved's 'eyes' in the realm of death, before the two are separated; they are joined and divided through a look.

The myth of Orpheus could have appealed to Rosenberg for various reasons among which there are the association of the myth with the wisdom of the poet, his

⁴ The summary of the myth is indebted to Strauss, pp. 5-6.

⁵ For various accounts of the myth of Orpheus see *ibid.*, pp. 5-6; see also Charles Segal, *Orpheus: the Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 155-98.

relation to the society and his ability to generate transformation, in social and literary terms; it is, in fact, considered the myth of the poet:

for the redefinition of the poet and poetry, the Orphic myth provided the supports that were generally seized upon by theorists and by poets themselves. Was it not tempting to think of the poet, dispossessed by ages of cold reason, recovering his own domain as soothsayer, harmoniser, even legislator...?⁶

It was. And because the myth of Orpheus is associated with the theme of transformation and metamorphosis, it was expected that it (and other classical myths) "should provide a rich occasion for reassessment and reinterpretation."⁷ This transformation comes through the unity between Apollo and Dionysus, where Orpheus is considered a "Dionysus... Apollonized."⁸

Dionysus was a son of Zeus, but his creation was complicated by second chances. Zeus's son Zagreus was killed by the Titans whom Zeus therefore annihilated; but Athena retained Zagreus's heart and gave it to Zeus who swallowed it, and begot Zagreus again under the name Dionysus. Apollo is associated with heaven, the spirit and air, while Dionysus is connected to the Earth, the body and the Bacchic. Orpheus's relation to these figures brings into account his role as a unifier, mediator and reconciler of opposites, as he has characteristics of both figures. His lyre, musical powers and discard of earthly joy, as signs of Apollonian solar enlightenment, associate him with Apollo,⁹ while also relating to Apollo's musical talent and power, since he too had the ability to gather wild beasts around him by the power of his music.¹⁰ Orpheus's journey to the underworld suggests Dionysian "subterranean knowledge."¹¹ But such a journey also implies an interest in life-after-

⁶ Strauss, pp. 9-10.

⁷ Ibid., p. 3. For more on the modern context of reassessment and change see also p. 4; and on such tendency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see also E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks And The Irrational* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), p. 148.

⁸ E. M. Cornford, *From Religion To Philosophy* (London: E. Arnold, 1912), p. 195.

⁹ Strauss, p. 18.

¹⁰ W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952, Third edition, 1993), p. 42.

¹¹ Strauss, p. 18.

death which transcends subterranean knowledge to solar enlightenment about mortality. In addition, Orpheus's death relates him to Dionysus who was torn asunder by the Titans.¹² Hence, Orpheus "ideally suited to bridge the gap between two modes [Apollonian and Dionysian] of looking at the world... the fusion of the Apollonian dream and of Dionysiac intoxication, in music, as well as poetry," to become, as Strauss calls him, a "servant of Dionysus and pupil of Apollo."¹³ As W. K. C. Guthrie puts it: "If he [Orpheus] preached the religion of Dionysus he at the same time reformed it."¹⁴ In other words, Orpheus is both rather than either; he reconciles the opposites. J. J. Bachofen offered a different way of looking at this relation in suggesting a completion rather than opposition between the two streams:

Apollo becomes the upper complement of Dionysus, Dionysus becomes the downward continuation of Apollo. A Bacchic Apollo, an Apollonian Dionysus emerge from this conjunction"¹⁵

Nonetheless, Orpheus's unification of the Dionysian and the Apollonian brings once again Prometheus, who does not reconcile opposites and rather emphasise their collision.

The identification of the poet's mission with that of Orpheus, rather than Prometheus, is related to the question of regeneration. This applies for the poet himself as well as for his public; this is basically what Strauss, in an earlier quotation, called a 'recovery':

All modern poetry has been a quest for self-renewal and the Orphic poet seeks to regenerate himself practically by means of the voyage downward, with its attendant self-recognition through remembrance and its mandatory self transformation, followed by a return to the world that will become the ground for vaster metamorphosis.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., p. 39.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 7;18.

¹⁴ Guthrie, pp. 41-2.

¹⁵ Quoted in Strauss, p. 18. Originally from J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Occident* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1956), pp. 396-7.

Here is a basic difference between Orpheus and Prometheus, where the latter (in contradistinction to the former) is a symbol of mere alienation, retreat and isolation without any further goal; the act of rejection for him is both the means and the end. Therefore, Prometheus is associated with the so-called 'performance principle' in the sense that he only affirms the opposition between man and the world of nature, the body and the spirit, without attempting to find a solution.¹⁷ On the other hand, Orpheus states the problem and attempts to solve it in trying to reach reconciliation:

Orpheus does not rebel; he does not lead people; he charms them. Prometheus aims for an outer transformation of the society... All modern literature tends to fall within the area of these two points of reference, rebellion and refusal.¹⁸

Thus, what the 'new' understanding of 'poet and poetry' meant was a stronger sense of "self consciousness... the divorce of self from cosmos and the division of self from self - along with the desire to heal the breach and usher in a new age of the spirit."¹⁹ While the Promethean theme, based on mere rejection, affirms the existence of a repressive order which causes the breach, the Orphic theme works beyond this end, rejecting the repressive order and reaching a solution:

The song of Orpheus pacifies the animal world, reconciles the lamb and the lion with man. The world of Nature is a world of oppression, cruelty, and pain, as is the human world; like the later, it awaits its liberation.²⁰

Unlike the Promethean act of emphasising the external conflict with the society which hinders any further internal attempts to overcome such conflict, the Orphic solution is wholly internal and it exploits such internalisation to pave the way for what turns out to be an act of 'self-satisfying'. As Elizabeth Sewall puts it:

The Orphic voice attests a tradition and a method of thinking... it means that here is a marvellously adapted instrument for ordinary

¹⁶ Strauss, pp. 12-3.

¹⁷ See Marcuse, pp. 165-66.

¹⁸ Strauss, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁰ Marcuse, p. 166.

people to use in understanding their universe and themselves. It can and should enliven every situation in which thinking in words is going on – literature, criticism, education... It is not a matter for specialists, but for people.²¹

However, with this idea of liberation, it must be noted that the myth of Orpheus is not real; it “does not convey ‘a mode of living’”, as Marcuse suggested, and rather belongs to “the underworld” and to “death” where the aim is not to teach a lesson but rather “awakens and liberates potentials that are real in things animate and inanimate.”²² As Sewell puts it:

Orphic genius, each time it occurs, is more than just the appearance of one particular mind, active in thinking and writing. It constitutes itself a point of transformation, a living instance of postlogic in the context of its own historical period. In this tradition, each such mind is itself an example of the process it seeks to discover and perfect.²³

This is very well-symbolised by Orpheus’s journey to the underworld, his earthly self, his return from which means an abandonment of the ‘flesh’ and retreat to the spirit.

Nonetheless, Rosenberg was no less interested in the definition of the poet and his vocation, and traces of such concern are scattered throughout his letters, prose and poems. Two poems titled “The Poet” clarify such preoccupations. In “The Poet”(I), the poet’s vocation is considered in a journey in search for the parts of his divided self. The journey is spiritual and moves ‘upward’, to heaven:

The trouble of the universe is on his wonder travelled eyes.
Ah, vain for him the starry quest, the spirit’s wistful sacrifice.
For though the glory of the heavens celestially in glimpses seen
Illumines his rapt gazing, still the senses shut him in.

(Lines 1-4)

It is to be noted that the poet is cautious about the trouble of the universe. Gwendolyn Bays found an essential aspect of the Orphic vision in the image of the

²¹ Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 404.

²² Marcuse, p. 165.

²³ Sewell, p. 171.

poet “as seer, as prophet and interpreter of the gods,” by which the poet appears as one who not only describes the external world but also ventures into its essences, speculates about its nature and tries to highlight all aspects of the ‘trouble’ and therefore the Orphic vision asserts that “philosophy and poetry are one.”²⁴ In associating himself with the ‘trouble’, the poet comes to suffer a sense of ‘divided self’. In searching for a solution, he sets off on a journey which significantly moves ‘downward’, to the earth, (the journey ‘downward’ becomes a prerequisite for the journey ‘upward’) which proves to him, as he becomes a mere sufferer of the trouble for he assumed this role, that the problem is due to the control of the terrestrial realm, ‘the spirit’s wistful sacrifice’ and ‘still the senses shut him in’:

Himself he has himself betrayed, and deemed the earth a path of heaven,
And wandered down its sunless days, and too late knew himself
bereaven
For swiftly sin and suffering and earth-born laughter meshed his ways,
And caught him in a cage of earth, but heaven can hear his dewy lays.

(Lines 10-3)

The fact that the poet’s ‘senses shut him in’ in line with ‘the spirit’s wistful sacrifice’ shows that the previous idea of the divorce from the self has not yet materialised, and that the journey downward is the way for the required metamorphosis. As Bays puts it: “The treacherous descent into Avernus... must precede the arduous ascent of the Cramel which leads up the steep hill of self-naughting, nonattachment and charity.”²⁵ Though the poet here does not directly emphasise the need to abandon the earthly and sacrifice it for the heavenly, he implicitly states it. He identifies the problem and leaves the solution, which is very clear, to be elicited. In this sense, he is not a rebel; he does not lead people; he leaves them the duty of performing their ‘inner’ individual transformation.

This role of the poet is clearer in “The Poet (II)”. He poses as an agent of spiritual rebirth:

So shut in are our lives, so still,
That we see not of good or ill -
A dead world since ourselves are dead.

²⁴ Bays, p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

Till he, the master, speaks and lo!
 The dead world's shed,
 Strange winds, new skies and rivers flow
 Illumined from the hill.

(lines 8-14)

The poet's role is rendered as an act of rejecting the 'familiar'; his treatment of the elements of the universe turns them out as 'strange' and 'new'. He poses as some one who does not accept any conclusions about the nature of his world and rather keeps thinking about it. Since his contribution is 'strange' and 'new', he is not someone who concludes but rather one who calls for further speculation and thought. He does not solve the riddle, he simply points to it and brings it for revaluation. This is a basic Orphic characteristic for, as Sewell asserts, the myth asks the individual "to think of myth and poetry, under the figure of Orpheus, as an instrument of knowledge and research."²⁶ With this perception of the poet, Rosenberg's addresses to the Jewish people, which earlier (in *Moses*) posed as an attempt to stimulate a spiritual revival, appear to be related to the Orphic vision. He is not a Prometheus leading them towards a rejection of the 'outer' reality but is rather an Orpheus charming them for a realisation of their spiritual death, which is the source of their 'trouble', paving the way for a vaster 'transformation', as previously described. This is the essence of Rosenberg's conception of violence, as outlined in *Moses* where the rift between the spirit and the body is bridged. Like Orpheus, Moses abandons the 'flesh', Koelue, and enjoys instead spiritual and mental sexuality. The control of the earth as is depicted in the image of the 'cage of earth' and its related implication of death-in-life emphasise the obstacle impeding any movement 'upward', to the heavenly and spiritual.

Rosenberg's "I Have Lived in the Underworld too Long" further explains this Orphic vision, the title alluding to Orpheus's visit to the underworld. Again, the motif beyond this journey is the achievement of spiritual revival in attempting to heal a breach of a divided self:

I have lived in the underworld too long
 For you, O creature of light,

²⁶ Sewell, p. 4.

To hear without terror the dark spirit's song
And unmoved hear what moves in night.

(lines 1-4)

The search for the lost part of the self is essenced to the opposition between the two, which suggests their completion. The lost part is associated with light while the part in search is associated with the song of the 'dark spirit'; but each entity needs to be united ("I am a spirit that yours has found") otherwise, the breach will intensify the 'darkness' and sadness:

Creature of light and happiness,
Deeper the darkness when you
With your bright terror eddying the distress
Grazed the dark waves and shivering further flew.

(lines 9-12)

The opposition between light and darkness, heaven and earth and fire (negative presence) and water is telling; Bays drew a significant distinction between the Orphic image of the poet as 'seer' and that of the 'mystic poet':

the seer poets chose the symbols water, darkness, and descent to describe their experiences - the exact opposite of those used by the mystics who spoke of their in terms of fire, light, and ascent. 'The dark night of the soul,'... was a preliminary stage considered essential to illumination proper... the necessity for coming face to face first with the conscious before he can even hope to attain illumination.²⁷

'The dark night of the soul' becomes for Rosenberg 'the dark spirit's song'.

The poet provides a moment of spiritual revival without which the sufferer can not identify his problem, of the need to overcome the control of the earthly part of his self, for he needs an awareness of his spiritual part in order to be able to achieve such identification. Then, the Orphic poet "possesses a certain key to the invisible world and accordingly speaks the language of correspondences."²⁸ Rosenberg believes in the liberating power of the poet. He considers the 'word', the poet's medium, 'the key of the gates of heaven' in his poem "The Key of the Gates of Heaven":

²⁷ Bays, p. 20.

²⁸ Marcuse, p. 81.

A word leapt sharp from my tongue,
 Could a golden key do more
 Than open the golden door
 For the rush of the golden song?
 She spoke, and the spell of her speech -
 The chain of the heart linked song -
 Was on me swift and strong,
 And Heaven was in my reach.

(lines 1-8)

The role of the poet as an agent of rebirth is central for the image of a mother earth; his poem becomes the womb in which rebirth materialises. While Orpheus's achievement of transformation is the consequence of his journey to the mother earth, the reader's metamorphosis begins in the poem. Thus, it is the power of the 'she-word' which generates the change. However, the poem is not only the realm of the journey downward where rebirth is to be achieved, it is also the realm of the journey upward where the achieved rebirth starts its 'Being':

Flew clear 'tween the rosebud gate
 That was parted beneath and above

(Lines 13-4)

Important here is the poet's power over the universe; his words help to achieve new attitudes by means of placing the world under sustained thinking, an Orphic characteristic. Hence:

The story seems to say that poetry has power not only over words and hence over thoughts, but also in some way over natural objects and their behaviour, be they animate or inanimate; and to some extent, in conjunction with love, power over life and death as humans know or suffer them; that this power is almost indestructible and may turn, even in its own disaster, to something akin to prophesy.²⁹

The power of the poem, which enables the poet to prepare for rebirth, is linked with the power of music, song, harp, and lyre. In the last two lines of "The Key of the Gates of Heaven", the 'word' is associated with 'the golden song':

And a chain of music wove,
 More strong than the hand of fate.

²⁹ Sewell, pp. 3-4.

In "My Songs", Nature is harmonised by the power of the song:

And flowing through my soul, the skies
And all the winds and all the trees
Mixed with its stream of light, to rise
And flow out in these melodies.

(lines 9-12)

Relatedly, the poet poses as a singer in "The Poet (I)": "To his divided self he calls and sings the story of earth's wrong", and in "The Poet (II)" as well: "He sings the song they sang for him." A lack of music and song becomes a sign of temporal spiritual death of Nature which, when exposed to music, returns alive in a sense of rebirth. In the last lines of "Lines Written in an Album To J. L.", death is caused by the absence of music:

The music of the singer
Whose silence was its death.

And rebirth is to be achieved by the power of the music and the song:

The birds that sang in summer
Were silent till the spring;
For hidden were the flowers,
The flowers to whom they sing.
December's jewelled bosom-
Closed mouth - hill-hidden vale -
Held seed soon full to blossom;
Held song that would not fail.

(lines 1-8)

Orpheus was a lyrist and his power was essenced to his music and songs. So was David; and the Jewish 'trouble', so to speak, as Rosenberg perceives it in "Ode to David's Harp", is related to the silence of David's harp. David, a member of the tribe of Judah, was the second king of the Israelites, after Saul. He was an aid to king Saul, a friend of Saul's son Jonathan, and a husband to Saul's daughter Michal. He showed distinctive courage as warrior against the Philistines. His martial prowess attracted the attention of his people to the extent that they celebrated him more than Saul who consequently felt jealous: "And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten

thousands. And Saul was very wroth.” (1Samuel, 18: 7-8). David flew away to the lands of the Philistines, and later when Saul and Jonathan were killed by the Philistines, David became the king, united the kingdom over Israel, bringing together all the disintegrated tribes, and hence became a symbol for peace, unity, success, settlement and achievement.³⁰ In his early life David, the youngest of Jesse’s sons, and a talented singer and harpist, used to tend his father’s sheep. Such musical and poetic powers are rendered in the Bible in the elegiac song after the death of Saul and Jonathan. (2 Samuel, 1: 19-27, and also in other places such as 2 Samuel, 20).

Therefore, Orpheus’s musical and poetic abilities are associated with those of David. Charles Segal suggested that the mournful voice of Orpheus might be seen as an identification with the image of poet-as-singer as represented in old patterns of the shepherd kings such as David.³¹ Guthrie also claimed the Old Testament’s adoption of characteristics of Orpheus “in the person of David, its magical musician playing among the sheep and wild beasts of the wilderness.”³² Furthermore, John R. Bartlett referred to the idea that “Orpheus, the founder of the Greek religion known as Orphism, was taught by Moses.”³³ John Block Friedman explained:

About the middle of the third century B. C. a new and quite un-Hellenic story about Orpheus came into circulation - one which... was to be responsible in large part for Jewish and Christian interest in his legend during the next centuries. This was the story of how Orpheus rejected polytheism... Orpheus travelled in his youth to Egypt where he received training in philosophy from no less a teacher than Moses himself. Having learned monotheism from its source, he remembered it throughout his life.³⁴

With the wisdom of the poet and his image as an agent of spiritual metamorphosis embodied in the myth of Orpheus, in addition to Orpheus’s relation to Moses and the

³⁰ See R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King: A Tradition-historical Approach to the Second Book of Samuel* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964).

³¹ Segal, p. 4.

³² Guthrie, p. 264.

³³ John R. Bartlett, *Jews in The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), p. 10; see also Richard Cody, *The Landscape of The Mind: Pastoralism and Platonic Theory in Tasso’s Aminta and Shakespeare’s Early Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 32.

³⁴ John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 13; and he gives a documentary evidence of what he calls ‘testaments’.

similarity between David and Orpheus, it is not surprising to find Rosenberg adopting Orphic themes. However, Orpheus, the musician and poet, was also a lover.

Rosenberg, Glenn Alan Carnagey argued, associates love and music in such poems as "On a Lady Singing" and "A Bird Trilling its Gay Heart Out", written between 1913-4; Carnagey alleged that Rosenberg was in love at the time and that references to the beloved's musical talent in these poems suggest that she was Annetta Raphael who was a singer and pianist, rather than Sonia Cohen who did not have similar associations with music and singing; Carnagey asserted that associating Rosenberg's love with Annetta was important because:

Without positing a new love for the late 1913 and 1914 poems it is difficult to account for vast outpouring of love during this period and for their concentration on the musical abilities of the women the poet loves.³⁵

The association between music and love could be accounted for in relation to the Myth of Orpheus, avoiding the difficulty Carnagey claimed. In the above poems the beloved controls and enslaves the lover. In the first poem: "She bade us listen to the singing lark/ In tones sweeter than its own." This ambiguity is also evident in the comparative structure that recurs in the last two lines: "Praising herself the more in giving praise/ To music less than she." Ironically, the image of the cage is accompanied by complexity of 'fear', 'gracious', 'shrined' 'sceptred' and 'humility':

For fear that she should cease and leave us dark
We built the bird a feignéd throne,
Shrined in her gracious glory-giving ways
From sceptred hands of starred humility.

(lines 3-6)

At the heart of the poem are oppositions between freedom and slavery, darkness and light, glory and submission. Indeed, the confusing references to the lark and the lady reflect on the lover's involuntary submission to a seductive female. This can also be seen in "A Bird Trilling its Gay Heart Out":

³⁵ Glenn Alan Carnagey, "Isaac Rosenberg: From Innocence to Experience", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Univ. of Tulsa. 1984, p. 140; 146.

I could not shut my spirit's doors
 I was so naked and alone,
 I could not hide and it saw that
 I would not to myself have shown.

(lines 9-12)

Paradoxically, the controlling female is told to have caged herself in the lover's heart, when the poem reveals that it is the poet who is enslaved:

A bird trilling its gay heart out
 Made my idle heart a cage for it
 Just as the sunlight makes a cage
 Of the lampless world its song has lit.

(lines 1-4)

Darkness becomes a cage for light; but the association between darkness and the female has more to offer: "Just as the dark might angry be/ If sudden light her face unmasked." Then the female is masked in darkness. Carnagey argued that the female is associated with frustration and obstacles against love:

Most of these [the love poems of late 1913-1914] reflect negative emotions as hindering the development of love. Fear of the physical aspects of love in particular became a subject of interest to Rosenberg, for that fear kept him frustrated in his courtship with Sonia Cohen.³⁶

This double nature of the female is not as simple as Carnagey seems to imply by claiming a love affair between Rosenberg and Sonia Cohen; this claim is compromised by the fact that the female in Rosenberg's poetry is associated with frustration and also by Carnagey's reference to two women as the possible beloved, Sonia and Annetta, the latter when Carnagey attempts to account for the musical abilities of the female in the previous poems. The matter is rooted in a deeper symbolic message Rosenberg essenced to his ambiguous and multi-dimensional female figures, such as his Lilith, and 'female god'. The symbolic aspect can be seen in relation to the female character in the myth of Orpheus, where music is also a central issue.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

Daughters of War

Earlier interpretations of Rosenberg's poetry registered a number of characteristics that can be related to the myth of Orpheus, particularly in terms of the female principle. Richard Anderson claimed a possible influence of Nietzsche on Rosenberg in terms of the difference that the latter suggests between Apollonian and Dionysian artists.³⁷ Anderson considered the character of Moses to be, at first, "wholly Dionysian" but later, when Moses performs his revolt, to appear as "Apollonian rather than Dionysian."³⁸ In light of the previous suggestion of Orpheus's relation to, or even reformation of, Dionysian traits, Moses's development from a Dionysian to an Apollonian figure bears resemblance to Orpheus. In addition, Anderson thought of the early Dionysian Moses to be related to Prometheus, drawing the attention to Nietzsche's argument about the connection between the Semitic myth of the Fall and the myth of Prometheus. That the early Dionysian-Promethean Moses becomes an Apollonian is another sign of a movement toward Orpheus.

The reference to the connection between the myth of Prometheus and the Semitic myth of the Fall is strongly related to the feminine principle. The relation between the two myths is assigned to the idea of the origin of evil. Anderson referred to the source of evil in the first as "pre-eminently feminine passions", where Man's desire for the female is considered a major cause of his fall.³⁹ This is connected to the myth of Pandora, "a beautiful woman made of clay by Zeus to avenge himself on Prometheus."⁴⁰ In suggesting the female as a possible source of evil in Rosenberg's *Moses*, Anderson is not too far mistaken; however, his understanding of the origin of evil in the Semitic myth of the Fall is not

³⁷ Richard Anderson, "Isaac Rosenberg - A Critical Study of his Plays and Poems", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Leicester, 1975, pp. 314-16.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 314; 315.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 314.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 314.

comprehensive and needs to be further examined for it rests on a controversially paradoxical issue.

The mystery of the feminine principle in the Semitic myth of the Fall and its composite relation to the idea of sexuality is essenced to the equivocal nature of the "Tree of Good and Evil". Robert Gordis examined this matter, trying to arrive at an understanding that outlives paradoxical interpretations which relate the "Tree of Good and Evil" to the idea of 'Knowledge', whether of "right and wrong... the secrets of nature and the arts of civilisation," or of good and evil "which represent the mature understanding of the world, which distinguishes the grownup from the child."⁴¹ He rejected such associations with knowledge and asserted that Adam was nowhere depicted in the myth as ignorant or immature, emphasising that his ability at 'naming' things constitute a further evidence of this:

That he could give names to the animals scarcely implies that he needed the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in order to gain maturity or insight into the secrets of nature, for to the ancients the name of thing was tantamount to its very essence.⁴²

Gordis believed that the significance of the Tree of Knowledge lay in the opposition between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death. He proposed that "the knowledge of good and evil is 'sexual consciousness'."⁴³ He investigated the linguistic background for the Biblical terms for 'knowing good and evil', saying that it is used of "children who still do not possess sexual consciousness", an interpretation raised by the fact that "biblical Hebrew compensates for its limited vocabulary by the richness of nuance of words."⁴⁴ In such an interpretation the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death become related: "the Tree of Life represents eternal life in the flesh; the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, sexual consciousness and the immortality which comes through the procreation of children."⁴⁵ The Tree of

⁴¹ Robert Gordis, *The Word and The Book: Studies in Biblical Language and Literature* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1976), pp. 75-6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Life, in this sense, represents sexual knowledge that becomes a counterpart for the power of the Tree of Death. 'Sexual consciousness' as a means for achieving immortality through procreation is indivisibly related to the female figure. However, such relation is still muddled and in need of more examination, for it remains mysterious whether or not sexuality is to be condemned as the major source of evil.

Gordis, in another place, investigated the Christian and Jewish perceptions of sexuality, finding a rich field of opposition between the two.⁴⁶ He found in Christianity a negative attitude towards intercourse:

According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus forbids divorce and marriage. The parallel passage in Mathew goes further and extols celibacy over marriage as the ideal state for a human being, of which not all people are capable. (Mat. 19:10-12)⁴⁷

Later Gordis referred to Paul who "himself was unmarried and wished all could emulate his example," saying that in Christianity "marriage is created, basically as a concession to the weakness of human nature".⁴⁸ Thus, there is a war between the body and the soul in the Christian perception of sex; such war is considered to have resulted in the emphasis that "marriage is necessary for procreation of the race and can be justified in the eyes of God on this basis and only for this purpose."⁴⁹ Such perception is related to the idea of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve in Christianity where it is considered to be "concupiscence".⁵⁰

The case is different in Judaism: "it is in the area of sexual ethics that the Jewish tradition has something distinctive and valuable to contribute to the world."⁵¹ Unlike Christianity where celibacy, Gordis argued, is considered the ideal state of humanity, in Judaism:

⁴⁶ Robert Gordis, *Love and Sex: A Modern Jewish Perspective* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988).

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 85.

the marriage relationship between a man and a woman is not a concession to the lower instincts, but, on the contrary, the ideal human state, because it alone offers the opportunity of giving expression to all aspects of human nature.⁵²

The Original Sin of Adam and Eve in Judaism also differs from that in Christianity being assigned to the act of “disobedience, not sex”.⁵³ Nevertheless, sexuality might become a source of evil, an ‘evil-impulse’ as it is called in traditional Rabbinical teachings, when it leads men “to violate the dictates of reason and canons of morality, overriding their ideals and distorting the patterns of their lives”; hence “Judaism has a realistic understanding of the power of sex, both for good and evil,” leaving man the duty of channelling it for good despite its capacity for evil.⁵⁴

Therefore the female figure is to be viewed differently in the Judaic understanding of the Myth of the Fall. This is very clear in the motives beyond marriage:

Judaism has always recognised two purposes in marriage... The first is the fulfilment of the first commandment, ‘be fruitful and multiply’... The second function of marriage is that of companionship. Actually, it is the only motive assigned in the creation of a helpmate for Adam: “It is not good for man to dwell alone; I will make a helper for him” (Gen.: 18)⁵⁵

As a result, sex acquires a meaning different from the pejorative Christian sense. “Judaism regards it not merely as permissible but mandatory for a man and his wife to derive pleasure from the sexual act, which has been ordained by God and, by that token, is holy”; love and sex become closely related.⁵⁶

Rosenberg’s ideas about sin and sexuality reflect a similar Judaic perception. His poem “Creation” seems an individual reading of the story of the Fall. The cause of the Fall is related to man’s pride, rather than to sexuality:

⁵² Ibid., p. 98.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 105-6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 101-2.

As the pregnant womb of the night
Thrills with imprisoned light,
...
So man, with no sudden stride
Bloomed into pride.

(lines 1-6)

These lines suggest that pride is the cause of the violation of God's law. The next stanza clarifies this proposition more:

In the womb of the All-spirit
The universe lay; the will
Blind, an atom, lay still.
The pulse of matter
Obeyed in awe
And strove to flatter
The rhythmic law.
But the will grew; nature feared
And cast off the child she reared,
Now her rival, instinct-led,
With her own powers impregnated.

(lines 7-17)

The universe, an infant in God's womb, is a suggestion of man's life on earth so that life in heaven is likely to give birth to man's life after the Fall. The infant is presented as a 'blind will' that is still 'an atom'. The idea of blindness is multidimensional; it is a reflection on the darkness of the womb, and of life before the Fall where man blindly obeys the laws of the creator. Rosenberg's image here is perhaps rooted into the context of his existence as a Jew in England; it reflects his own feelings that the same kind of blind obedience may lie at the essence of the assimilation. It was discussed earlier that his rejection of the emancipation was grounded on the fact that it only served the body and left the spirit unsatisfied. In other words, prelapsarian existence comes to symbolise the assimilation, with the earlier being the macrocosm and the later as the microcosm. The emancipation is just as unsatisfactory as was life before the Fall, as evident in the strong sense of abandonment revealed in the poem. Another dimension of Blindness lies in its relation to 'instinct' where a significant association between the imminent life on earth and man's desire for sublimation is being held. Man's Fall is 'instinct-led' but, still, it is not the sexual instinct that was intended by Rosenberg; the idea that this

new birth frightens nature and poses as 'her rival' suggests a different sense of sexuality, one increasingly 'unnatural'.

The third stanza alludes to such spiritual sexuality:

Brain and heart, blood-fervid flowers,
Creation is each act of yours.
Your roots are God, the pauseless cause,
But your boughs sway to self-windy laws.

...

With each new light, our eyes receive
A larger power to perceive.

(lines 18-25)

Man, and the elements of nature, are encountered with the laws of the creator; but man is governed by his own laws ("self-windy laws"). Man is trying to become god-like ("A larger power to perceive"), and to achieve sublimation, as the first two lines of the next stanza show:

If we could unveil our eyes,
Become as wise as the All-wise.

(lines 26-8)

Man's attempt to become god-like is presented as the only way to achieve harmony in the self, otherwise the conflict will be infinite.

Rosenberg argues that unless man achieves a god-like position,

No love would be, no mystery.
Love and joy dwell in infinity.
Love begets love; reaching highest
We find a higher still, unseen
From where we stood to reach the first.

(lines 28-32)

Man's instinct-socialisation will continue and the 'mystery' generated by this attitude will remain. The last line asserts the continuity of the desire for sublimation with man's original aim being constantly enlarged. In considering the origin of perfection as a 'root', man's original pride is suggested as the root for his proposed

perfection which is portrayed, in the fifth stanza, as an attempt to achieve god-like perfection:

Thus human hunger nourisheth
The plan terrific - true design -

(lines 44-5)

It is evident here that Rosenberg does not consider sexuality the original sin: "What foolish lips first framed 'I sin'?" Spiritual sexuality is kept at the background: "The virgin spirit grows within", suggesting that this growth of the spirit makes man reject the eternal lack of active dwelling in paradise:

A chalice of light for stagnation
To drink, but where no dust can come
Till the glass shatters and light is dumb.

(lines 53-5)

In the penultimate stanza, the growth of the soul, "Soul grows in freedom natural", reflects the need to overcome the bars of the prison-like dwelling in heaven, an idea that relates to the image of 'imprisoned light' in the second line of the poem. This spiritual freedom is not a 'sin', for it is 'natural'. The final interrogation of the story of the Fall comes in the last stanza where man achieves infinite wisdom:

Our thoughts like endless waterfalls
Are fed - to fill life's palace halls
Until the golden gates do close
On endless gardens of repose.

...

This universe shall be to me
Millions of years beneath the sea
Cast from my rock of changelessness
The centre of eternity.
And uncreated nothingness,
Found, what creation laboured for
The ultimate silence - Ah, no more
A happy fool in paradise,
But finite - wise as the All-wise.

(lines 74-90)

The consequences of man's fall will lead to immortality and ultimate wisdom in contradiction with the 'lost' initial eternal happy dwelling in paradise that was accompanied by finite wisdom, 'foolishness'.

Another Judaic perception of sexuality is apparent in Rosenberg's assertion that love and lust are identical. In "Night and Day" he asks the question: "Then said I, what divides love's name from lust?" (line 58). The answer is offered in his "Love and Lust" written later:

O lust! when you lie ravished,
Broken in the dust,
We will call for love in vain,
Finding love was lust.

(lines 5-8)

The association between love and lust is ambiguous; even though the inseparability of the two is superficially asserted, a sense of mystery is also camouflaged concerning the mortality of love as suggested by its implicit death when lust dies, for the two are identical. It is here where the idea of female as a companion arises. Love's death, as a result of the death of lust, suggests the lack of company the lover suffers when his beloved dies.

There are many parallels between the Semitic Myth of the Fall and the Myth of Orpheus, regarding the question of sin, descent, and love. Both Adam's and Orpheus's descent have associations with a search for a female each had lost. In the case of Orpheus an attempt at overcoming the power of death is rendered in his descent to the underworld in order to win back his beloved, Eurydice, from the realm of death. Adam's fall, as seen earlier, is associated with procreation as a means of overcoming the bounds of mortality and death. However, the idea of love as a means of overcoming death fails in both. In the Myth of the Fall death can be defeated only through procreation, and in the myth of Orpheus procreation is impossible after the death of Eurydice, in addition to the consequent separation of the lovers.

The absence of the female figure in the myth of Orpheus and the defeat of love by death are not mere losses of sexuality. This is, in addition, a loss of companionship. These two motives constitute the ambiguity of the female figure in the myth itself. Because Orpheus poses as an ideal lover, it is possible that the myth indicates the failure of the female at love. Still, the fact that this failure is due to

death makes it ambiguous whether the female is to be blamed or not. However, such indication might be clarified in referring to the representation of the myth throughout literary history by other poets. Ovid's Pygmalion myth is a case in hand. In *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus narrates the story of Pygmalion, and the two are meant to be connected. As Segal puts it:

Like Orpheus, Pygmalion is a consummate artist, though his medium is stone, not words; and like Orpheus, he is also (temporarily) hostile to women. Like Orpheus too his art gives him the magical power of crossing the boundaries between inert matter and living consciousness.⁵⁷

In Pygmalion a paradox between reality and imagination arises where a major aspect of the Orphic Myth's association with the power of art is exploited. The myth embodies a dual possibility: "the poet's transcendence of the laws of nature by his magic power, or his defeat by the sternest of nature's necessities."⁵⁸ Thus, Pygmalion is an act of questioning the ability of imaginative art at overcoming death. But as regards the female figure, in Pygmalion, the duality of the imaginative and real female figure is an equally major issue. "The artist creates an ideal image of his own love, in contrast to the ugly reality of the women around him, and endows that object with a beauty inappropriate to it."⁵⁹

The distinction between reality and imagination is significant in Rosenberg's idea of female power and it relates to the second motive beyond marriage in Judaism: companionship. This essential dimension which relates to the double nature of the female in Rosenberg's poetry with her positive and negative aspects, was overlooked in earlier studies. Though interested in relating Rosenberg's work to political issues about the Jewish community in England, Jon Silkin did not realise the significant relation between Rosenberg's theme of feminine power and the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, as outlined in the previous chapter. While asserting that "Rosenberg's God is the God of the Jews," Silkin assured that

⁵⁷ Segal, p. 27.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

for Rosenberg “the Female God is superior to the male.”⁶⁰ He then asserted the ‘fatal’ nature of the female god who is ‘usurper’, destroyer and a source of “pain” and “necessary suffering.”⁶¹ This shows that the female god has a double nature with a duality of positive and negative traits. V. M. R. Tallett claimed also that Rosenberg adopted “an archetypal feminine principle,” by which the female appeared as a “source of wisdom”, ‘shelter’ and ‘haven’ but she also referred to “an underlying idea of threat” in Rosenberg’s idea of the female, hence falling in the trap of the duality of Rosenberg’s female with ‘her’ contrary polar traits.⁶² Hence the supposedly sentimental feminine Christian God turns out to be a disguised destructive, authoritative and seductive character. (See the previous chapter). Misunderstanding in both cases can be overcome by relating Rosenberg’s idea of female power to the gap between reality and imagination as presented in the Orphic theme of Pygmalion. This also helps in achieving a better understanding of the ambiguous female figure in the myth of Orpheus.

Love is associated with ‘beauty’. Beauty, for Rosenberg, is ideal and imaginative like that in Pygmalion. In “Love to Be” beauty appears as a creation of the poet’s imagination:

... I thought on her
I never yet have seen, my love to be.
I conjured up all glorious shapes that were;
...
What thoughts, and what vague shadowing of me?

(lines 9-14)

The beloved’s beauty is the poet’s ‘thought’ and ‘shadowing of me’. Therefore the search for a real manifestation of such image fails:

By what far ways shall my heart reach to thine?
We, who have never parted - never met.

(lines 15-6)

⁶⁰ Jon Silkin, “Poet in the Trenches”, *Jewish Chronicle Supplement*, May. 1968, p. 3; Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), p. 292 .

⁶¹ Silkin, *Out of Battle*, p. 291.

⁶² Tallett, pp. 23; 24; 84; 86.

Beauty is one way in which the beloved controls her lover. When beauty is lost, she says: "I think beauty is a bad bargain made of life." (*The Amulet*, line 82). Hence, when her beauty 'fails', she resorts to 'false' beauty which is 'deceit': "Ah! When our beauty fails did we not use/ deceits." (*The Amulet*, lines 85-6). Similarly, in "Lady You Are My God", idealising the female figure to the degree of becoming a God is an imaginative creation of art under the pressure of love: "If my love made you God" (line 9). In addition, in "Beauty" (I), beauty is considered "An angel's chastity/ Unfretted by an earthly angel's lures." A contradiction between reality and imagination is present:

He list'ning, moves through life's wide presence-hall,
Blindly its turret clambers,
Then searches his own soul for the flying bacchanal.

(lines 1-2; 18-20)

The word 'bacchanal' here suggests the imaginative nature of the desired beauty. Its relation to Bacchus raises the question of the gap between reality and imagination as generated through drunkenness (whether real or spiritual). Because of ideal images and aspirations at moments of intoxication (physical or spiritual) disillusionment occurs afterwards when in sober conditions while facing the inferiority of the real counterpart. "Bacchanal" is a title of one of Rosenberg's poems in which an excessive repetition of "If life would..." asserts the division between the imaginative and the real.

The poet is unable to find a real figure who would match his ideal image. What is sought is spiritual beauty since the agent of search is the ear not the eye; the search is even associated with the spirit and music which is itself, as seen earlier, a sign of the spiritual power of the poet. However, the poet's return to his own spirit to search for his ideal love, after he fails to find her in 'life's wide presence-hall', indicates that the spirit is the only place where the object of his search lies. In reality, the image is distorted: "With softer meanings than its rude speech lends?" The whole treatment intensifies the poet's feelings of loneliness and lack of company which he announces in "Love To Be" ("We, who have never parted - never met".) That the two 'never parted' in the imagination of the poet makes infinite his search for a reality with which he 'never met'. This suggests the inability of the

female to rise up to the expectations of the poet. Despite the fact that such failure is not the responsibility of the female, as it is the poet who holds an unreal image of her, still 'she' is looked down upon as inferior.

The distinctive female-image in "Daughters of War" is a strong statement of this. The poet gives the sense of having found his searched-for reality where, instead of the previous image of listening to a voice that may resemble his wished-for ultimatum, he pictorialises a figure as if he sees her: "Space beats the ruddy freedom of their limbs -/ Their naked dances with man's spirit naked". It is true that the poet now 'sees' rather than 'hears'; but suddenly disillusionment occurs when it is stated that such image is imaginative "And shut from earth's profoundest eyes," so that the act of seeing is not performed with his own real eyes but rather "[I saw] in prophetic gleams." The female is a mere imaginative creation of poetry 'essenced to language':

Where pictures, lutes, and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought.
Essenced to language, thus -

(lines 46-8)

Aimee Wiest interpreted this passage as a "reference to the process of her [the seductive daughter of war] articulation, so similar to his own poetry-writing," which "reveals her secrets of success... when she 'essenced' her thoughts, she captured him. The wise daughter, employing the power of dance and speech, captivates the soul of her soldier."⁶³ Wiest is not mistaken in suggesting the female's control over the speaker; however, the comparison of the power of the female, the muse, and the writing of poetry is still to be argued. Important here is the relation between poetry and the universe, a relation that uncovers an Orphic vision. The oral theme here reveals how the poet's thought about the nature of the world around him is rendered in a special linguistic expression which denotes the essence of the things it designates. The language does not explain the 'riddle'; it simply draws the attention to it. Asserting that poetry is a mode of thought, Sewall explained the Orphic nature of similar perceptions of language, calling it a "marriage of thought and nature":

⁶³ Aimee Jeanne Wiest, "The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, Baltimore. 1984, p. 157.

In its beginnings, language is acknowledged by scholars to have been essentially figurative, imaginative, synthesizing, and mythological rather than analytical and logical... Myth and metaphor, living instruments of a lively speech, are not ornaments and artifices tacked on to language but something in the stuff of language and hence of the mind itself. Language is poetry, and a poem is only the resources of language used to the full.⁶⁴

Rosenberg often asserted that his words, language and poems are products of his 'mind' and 'brain': "Blown words whose root is the brain", he says in "Who Loses the Hour of the Wind".

In "The Female God", the poet expects to find in the female a satisfaction for his spiritual desire, "We curl into your eyes", but quickly becomes disillusioned: "They drink our fire and have never drained". The poet, who is definitely Jewish, no longer believes in the Jewish God and, instead, is enslaved by his desire for the imaginative female: "You have dethroned the ancient God./ You have usurped his Sabbath". Consequently, Tallett's argument about the association between the female and the idea of protection through the images of haven and shelter lacks an awareness of the significant opposition between reality and imagination which belongs to Rosenberg's Orphic vision.⁶⁵ The idea of protection attached to the female is merely imaginative and unreal, aroused by the poet's unconscious desire for it.

Tallett's proposed association between 'trees' and the feminine principle can serve as a basis for a further support of this. Tallett argued:

there are long-standing associations between trees and the feminine principle. Source of shelter and haven, image of birth and rebirth, the tree came to signify woman and goddess... The symbol of the tree is also central to Jewish thought, the paradigm appearing in Genesis where the Tree of Knowledge influences Mankind's destiny"⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Sewell, pp. 199; 6.

⁶⁵ Tallett, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

This perception of trees as a symbol of the female, Tallett acknowledged, is first stated by Joseph Cohen who alleged that: "Rosenberg's use of tree mythology is consistent with the twentieth century's emphasis on trees as female symbols rather than male ones."⁶⁷ Indeed, trees might also be symbols for the spirit in conjunction with imagination. In tracing the origins of Hebrew religion, dialectic between the body and the soul is found in the so-called animistic stage:

In the language of philosophy, Animism is a doctrine which places the source of mental and even physical life in an energy independent of or at least distinct from the body. From the point of view of the history of religion, the term is taken, in the wider sense, to denote the belief in the existence of spiritual beings, some attached to bodies of which they constitute the real personality (soul), others without necessary connexion with a determinate body (spirit).⁶⁸

Trees are part of "the more outstanding objects with which animism can best be illustrated":

the movement of a tree when swayed by the wind made it one of the things to be regarded by man in a very early stage of culture, first, as a living being, and later, as animated by a spirit.⁶⁹

Rosenberg's image of 'swaying boughs' in "Creation" and "The Garden of Joy" as a symbol for spiritual growth, as if being haunted by a spirit, relates to this symbolic meaning of trees rather than to the feminine principle. If trees are considered sources of protection, it is not because they symbolise women but rather because they are symbols for spiritual growth. They suggest feminine connotations only in the sense that they represent unreal objects of spiritual revival. Like the symbolic tree, the female is supposed to be a haven for the spirit while in reality she is not. This is evident in what Tallett called a 'polar dialectic' of women who like trees "combine positive and negative attributes" in the sense that its relation to the Tree of Knowledge is a relation to both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 9. Originally Cohen's statement appears in his *Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1975), p. 159.

⁶⁸ W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁰ Tallett, p. 4.

Indeed, the image of the female as an agent of protection is also encountered in the character of Lilith in *The Unicorn*. Legends depict Lilith as a female God created from dust as a mate for Adam to whom she subsequently refused to submit herself: "Why must I lie to you?"; "I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal".⁷¹ Consequently, Lilith left Adam to live in her home at the bottom of the sea, and started to wander in the world at night to seduce men to bear hundreds of demon children every day, though God destined a hundred of her children to die each day, punishing her for not obeying Adam; she avenges her children by killing the babies of Eve.⁷² Jason Sommer asserted that "there is no doubt that Rosenberg knew the legend of Lilith in some detail."⁷³ Trying to show "to what end the Lilith myth is presented in service" Sommer argued that "unquestionably, Rosenberg was trying to express, in the plays... the force behind the war... He was humanizing, however, while endeavoring at the same time to have the mythic significance retained by keeping character close to mythic bases" when "Lilith articulates one of the symbolic possibilities... to describe what happened around him in terms other than ironic or realistic."⁷⁴ Lilith, doubtlessly, is symbolically employed by Rosenberg. But what exactly did 'happen around him'? Tallett associated Lilith with what she considered a Rosenbergian interest in the female as a symbol for 'positive and powerful light', taking this female figure to be a Jewish symbol of feminine power "Whose inherent strengths were informed by male weakness".⁷⁵ Although Tallett recognised that Lilith was "a bogeywoman"⁷⁶ she did not realise her ominous nature; Lilith is a central symbol in Jewish religious demonology of the anthropomorphic kind, a female demon:

⁷¹ Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: Anchor, 1990), p. 65.

⁷² Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press., 1990), 3rd edition, pp. 221-54.

⁷³ Jason F. Sommer, "Lamp In His Blood: Some Jewish Motifs In The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Saint Louis Univ. 1985, p. 171.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 186; 188.

⁷⁵ Tallett, p. 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

who played a part in Hebrew Demonology in pre-Exilic times... Lilith is conceived as a beautiful woman, with long flowing hair; it is at night that she seeks her prey. She is dangerous to men because of her beauty.⁷⁷

Though it is clear that Lilith is a *femme-fatale* figure, Tallett considered her a symbol of the Great Mother archetype. She is seductive as her dangerous beauty and her association with night imply. Rosenberg's poetry strengthens this interpretation for it has numerous incidents where the female's hair is used as a symbol for danger. In "Returning We Hear The Larks", he says:

Death could drop from the dark

...

Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies there.

(Lines 10; 15)

And in "The Female God", he also says:

In the fierce forest of your hair

Our desires beat blindly for their treasure

(lines 3-4)

In this poem also, the seductive female figure is depicted as attacking during the night, a further suggestion of Lilith: "In sleep do your dreams battle with our soul."

In fact, Rosenberg's earlier title of the play as *The Amulet* shows his intention to suggest ominous characteristics, for amulets are central in Jewish demonology:

amulets were originally worn in order to ward off the attacks of evil spirits, and there are a number of passages in the Old Testament in which, therefore, the mention of an amulet implies a belief in demons.⁷⁸

Arguing that the female in "Daughters of War" is a Lilith figure, Beth Roberts asserted that Rosenberg:

realised that the vast majority of English readers would not respond to references to Lilith.... Perhaps he shied away from identification as a

⁷⁷ Oesterley and Robinson, pp. 117-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

Jewish poet... by assimilating the Jewish legend into his work, he made his poem more and less accessible to his audience, demonstrating that he could write for the English public through a more intense Jewish perspective.⁷⁹

The idea of assimilating Jewish themes into his poetry, an example of his fusion of Hebrew and English cultures, is evident in Rosenberg's poetry. But the danger in Roberts' argument is that Rosenberg seems to be sacrificing the Jewish for the sake of the English, which is not the case. Rosenberg uses the name Lilith explicitly in the title of his play, a superficial use of his Jewish heritage. Nevertheless, this exploitation has a further symbolic level, for the aim is not simply to tell the story of Lilith, but rather to make a comment on the outside world, the two cultures he fuses: a feminine Christianity and a masculine Judaism.

Consequently, the ambiguity of the female, who is associated with a polar characteristic of negative and positive attributes, is clarified in this polarity which draws attention to a gap between the imaginative sublime and the actual beauty. The power of the female through which she poses as a symbol for haven and protection, like Lilith's (and Judith's, Solome's, Vashti's, and Delilah's) power, results in fact from a "male weakness" caused by his sublime view of her that firstly allows him to be easily seduced, and secondly makes him disillusioned when he discovers her inability to approach his opinion of her.⁸⁰ Indeed, it is only the poet who can overcome such male weakness and becomes able to attack her by asserting her real inferiority. Thus, spiritual freedom of the male is bound up with his rejection of the seductive female; and this is exactly what Moses does, as discussed earlier.

At the time of Rosenberg, D. H. Lawrence was also working on the question of the female. There are many parallels between the two: both belonged to the working-class; both had physical problems which kept them, though in different degrees, away from performing a complete masculine role during their childhood and which influenced later stages of their lives and had an impact on their creative writing. However, differences between the two are numerous. Rosenberg

⁷⁹ Beth Roberts, p. 329.

⁸⁰ Tallett, p. 23.

compensated for his late male identity by joining the army and exposing himself to severe conditions. This was a means of affirming a male identity which itself entails a preceding identity crisis. Lawrence saw real war in art and not in the actual warfare of the Great War; In a letter to Harriet Monroe in 1914, he said:

It is the business of the artist to follow the war to the heart of the individual fighters - not to talk in armies and nations and numbers- but to track it home - home - their war - and it's at the bottom of every Englishman's heart - the war - the desire for war - the will to war - and at the bottom of every German heart.⁸¹

Like him Rosenberg asserted that the war had a psychological background in the individual's psyche, calling the war "O! ancient crimson curse!" ("On Receiving News of War"). Rosenberg had the same Lawrentian goal in his mind; but he made up his mind that he would never be able to do so unless he placed himself at the centre of the conflict, experiencing rather than speculating about it. Determined to expose himself to the experience of the trenches, his aim was not to "leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on" (*CW*, 248). Thus, both Lawrence and Rosenberg found in war a symbol for the struggle between Eros and death but, still, in different terms; while for Lawrence this conflict was always assigned to the anima and animus or, simply, man and woman, for Rosenberg, these opponents had never been separated from the opposition between the Jew and the Gentile in his mind. It is true that both used their art to reflect on their lives, whether as a revaluation or compensation, but this reflection differed. Lawrence's motto "art for my sake" is, Anne Smith alleges, a quest for regaining his lost sexual identity.⁸² This is further supported in relating Lawrence's erotic writings with what he says in *Aaron's Rod*:

Well, here was a letter for a poor old man to receive. But, in the dryness of his withered mind, Aaron got it out for himself. When a

⁸¹*The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Aldous Huxley (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932), p. 211.

⁸² Lawrence announced this in a letter, quoted by Philippa Tristram, "Eros and Death (Lawrence, Freud and Women)" in *Lawrence and Women*, ed. Anne Smith (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1978), p.154. See Anne Smith, "A New Adam and a New Eve - Lawrence and Women: A Biographical Overview" in Smith, p. 13.

man writes a letter to himself, it is a pity to post it to somebody else. Perhaps the same is true of a book.⁸³

Rosenberg's quest sought the achievement of national, basically racial, identity which he envisioned in terms of a sexual conflict. In other words, while the conflict between male and female in Lawrence's works represents a personal sexual crisis, for Rosenberg it is a symbol for the oedipal conflict between Judaism and Christianity.

Sexuality meant different things for both men; Lawrence, despite his naked treatment of sexuality, was reacting, at least unconsciously, against Anglo-Saxon puritanisms, an influence Rosenberg escaped. Lawrence's explicit treatment of sexuality is a release of suppressed elements, buried by his childhood physical weakness and his Christian background. Lawrence's war with Freud and psychoanalysis later in his career clarifies this more. He attacked Freud's 'exaggerated' attribution of sexual motive to all human experience:

What Freud says is always partly true. And half a loaf is better than no bread.

But really, there is the other half of the loaf. All is not sex.⁸⁴

As Philippa Tristram elegantly puts it:

Lawrence resented Freud's 'adventure into the hinterland of the human consciousness' more, perhaps, because an explorer does not like to feel that his journey has been anticipated, than because . . . their maps were different.⁸⁵

She argued that such resentment occurred because "where Freud sought to know, Lawrence sought to be".⁸⁶ However, it must be noted that both sought to be, but in different terms. Lawrence sought to be, in the sense of inventing a psychological

⁸³ D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1922), repr. 1971, p. 256.

⁸⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1961), repr. 1971, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Tristram, p. 138.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

basis for the so-called war between Eros and death, and accounting psychologically for the relation between the male and the female; and this would mean a compensation for his childhood male weakness, an act of proving the ability for being productive that responds to a subconscious feeling of female superiority and strength. Hence Laura Riding alleges that "independence from women has been the object of all the so-called 'creative' activity of man: the very notion of 'creation' implies the disappearance of the separate phenomenon 'woman' in male activity."⁸⁷ Freud sought his identity in attempting to replace Gentile anteriority by providing what might become a Judaism for the future, as Bloom claims; and Rosenberg is closer to Freud than he is to Lawrence (see Chapter Two). But the female image in both Rosenberg and Lawrence invite some comparisons. For Lawrence, the female is controlling, release from whom he sought in art. His image of the female as a 'Queen bee' in *Sons and Lovers* is a manifestation of such control:

Yea, like bees in and out of a hive, we come backwards and forwards to our woman... we are bees that go between, from the flower home to the hive and the Queen; for she lies at the centre of the hive, and stands in the way of bees for God, the Father, the Almighty, the Unknowable, the Creator. In her all things are born, both words and bees.⁸⁸

Thus, the female for Lawrence is an insect, Queen and 'God'. This is similar to Rosenberg's 'female god', who poses as "Queen! Goddess! animal!", ("The Female God", line: 13) and who controls the fellow males. Significantly, it is in this poem where Rosenberg announces that this female usurped the Jewish God, ("you have usurped his Sabbath") a point which clarifies the distinction between Lawrence's and Rosenberg's symbolic meanings of the female. Art and literature enable them to transcend the power of the female: to account for her power and to defy it. Therefore, art endows them with the necessary power and vision by which they overcome the female's control. Hence, Pygmalion's art projects on the reality of the female and paves the way for transcending earthly women to imaginary, possibly heavenly, substitutes, just like Orpheus's final retreat into his own self, achieving sublimation and transcending earthly love.

⁸⁷ Laura Jackson Riding, *The Word 'Woman' and Other Writings*, ed. Elizabeth Friedmann and Alan Clark (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1994) p. 81.

⁸⁸ Foreword to *Sons and Lovers*, in Aldous Huxley ed., p. 100.

Rosenberg's treatment of the power of art to overcome the bounds of mortal love, and the distorted image of the female are stages in his quest for Orphic sublimation. This is what earlier appeared as his preoccupation with the power of art, poetry, music, song etc. and which later developed to become a means for transcending earthly obstacles against spiritual strength. In dealing with the theme of love he sides with modern Orphic poets, for to "modern interpreters of the myth, Orpheus is not so much important as a poet as because he is a lover."⁸⁹ Still, however, he is aware of the triangular relation between art and love: "the creative power of art allies itself with the creative power of love."⁹⁰ In both cases, the aim is to overcome the power of death. However, after the failure of the female (love), art remains the only means of doing so.

Equally important in the myth of Orpheus is the idea of art as a means of investigating the secrets "of life and death".⁹¹ This aspect is evident in Orpheus's ability to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, transcending the capacity of the body. Rosenberg's preoccupation with the idea of death and his ability to present a genuine treatment of it, which D W Harding considered an indication of Rosenberg's ability to present death as a living experience, is associated with an idea of spiritual rebirth.⁹² His discussion of death, life, and rebirth is strongly related to the myth of Orpheus and represents his Orphic idea of the artist's infinite wisdom that transcends death. Again this relates to the Orphic power of the poet as 'seer', whose poetry is rooted in a mind that seeks to understand the muddled or at least to place it in a context of thought. Tallett argued that Rosenberg's poetry "shows his preoccupation with the root as an image of the mind."⁹³ In light of Rosenberg's interest in the theme of rebirth, the root is a metaphor for the growth of spiritual revival in the womb of the artist's mind, in his

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. XIV.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. xiv.

⁹² D. W. Harding, "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", *Scrutiny*, vol. III, no. 4 (March, 1935, p. 362.

⁹³ Tallett, p. 4.

art, in this case, the poem. Rosenberg refers to “the root side of the tree of life” in “Daughters of War”. In “Aspiration”, he describes such spiritual rebirth:

The roots of a dead universe are shrunken in my brain;
And the tinsel leafed branches of the charred trees are strewn;
And the chaff we deem'd for harvest shall be turned to golden grain.
Lines 1-3)

This does not contradict earlier interpretations of the root as a sign of Rosenberg's Jewishness in the sense that there is no contradiction between Jewishness and spiritual revival for Rosenberg asserted the Jews' need for spiritual revival, the poem becoming the womb of such rebirth. His treatment of the themes of death and rebirth resembles Orpheus who “embodies the essence of poetry, its ability to find, in art, a way to transform the emptiness, the radical deficiency, of human longing into something else.”⁹⁴

This characteristic, Charles Segal claimed, is central in the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke whose work constitutes the “most important poetic realisation of the myth of Orpheus in the literature of the twentieth century”.⁹⁵ Segal found also that Orpheus “is the mythical forbear of Rilkean poetics, the poet's claim to know the hidden roots of things.”⁹⁶ Rosenberg's root-image as a sign of transcendental understanding of being is marked by an awareness of the invisibility of such roots: “Hidden as a root from air or a star from day” (“Midsummer Frost”). Rilke defines the task of the poet as “to transform the visible, phenomenal world into an ‘invisible’ spiritual intensity, fullness, and meaningfulness.”⁹⁷ Like Rilke, Rosenberg defines poetry as “where an interesting complexity of thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable.” (CW, 238) He reflects Rilke's idea of transforming the ‘visible’ into ‘invisible’ meaningfulness. This ‘understandable ungraspable’ or ‘invisible meaningfulness’ is an aspect of the poet's preoccupation with the secrets of the universe which both attempted to internalise mentally, while searching for a unity essenced in the harmony of nature

⁹⁴ Segal, p. XIII. Segal here quotes Robert Hass, *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry* (New York, 1984), p. 233.

⁹⁵ Segal, p. 118.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. XIII.

which, significantly, they hear rather than see. Hearing is 'more Orphic' than seeing, for Orpheus's magic is associated with music and because his quest is imaginative; they want to hear because the harmony for which they search is 'invisible meaningfulness'.

The ear is their medium for achieving their quest. Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches" clarifies this:

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever,
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.

(lines 1-6)

The poet's search for a 'special experience', on which to base his poem, fails when he uses the 'eye' for the things he sees are familiar. Thus, he turns to the ear and it is after he sticks the poppy behind his ear that he starts realising the existence of something 'unfamiliar'. He feels a 'live' thing, an indication of the death of the familiar. It is true that the rest of the poem describes things to be seen, rather than heard; however, the act of seeing is inspired by the initial act of hearing and, thus, turns out to be imaginative. He even asks the rat to translate for him the images in his eyes: "What do you see in our eyes." Earlier interpretations consider the poppy a symbol for life; because Rosenberg describes how it drops blood - as it has its roots in "man's veins" - he is considered to be suggesting his own physical safety in concluding "But mine in my ear is safe."⁹⁸ However, the image of the poppy stuck behind the ear has more important allusions; it suggests lack of transcendental understanding of the scene by other soldiers the roots of whose poppies are in their veins while the persona, far from considering war a matter of survival, searches for a transcendental significance of it.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

⁹⁸ See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 49. See also Silkin, *Out Of Battle*, p. 280. However, Tallett (pp. 106-109) rejected such traditional interpretations and alleged that the poppy suggested a 'soul sense' not for death but rather for spirituality when the image of dropping blood becomes, rather than a sign of life-losing process, an indication of joy. And referring to the image of 'stuck in the ear', she considered that a

Significantly, Rilke uses a similar image like Rosenberg's:

There rose a tree. O pure transcendency!
O Orpheus singing! O tall tree in the ear!
And all was silent. Yet even in the silence
New beginning, beckoning, change went on.⁹⁹

The tree, for Rilke, transcends silence and opens the way for meaningful hearing. For both Rosenberg and Rilke, the poppy or simply the tree suggest transcendental insight. In fact, there are many parallels between these two poets in terms of major Orphic characteristics such as the belief in the power of language. Like Rosenberg's idea of 'essencing' transcendental experience to language, Rilke also adopts the Orphic perception of the poet as "a wonder-worker in words, transfiguring external reality by sounds."¹⁰⁰ However, they both try to make language express the inexpressible, death, for they treat death as an aspect of life. While Rosenberg's belief in this, as demonstrated earlier, is reflected in his image of "soul sacks", Rilke also adopts a similar image, 'mine of souls': "That was the so unfathomed mine of souls". ("Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes", stanza 1). Even though both develop an image of the female that is similar to the image in Pygmalion, each one exploits it for a different purpose; for Rilke it symbolises the "mysterious anima figure of the poet," while for Rosenberg, it symbolises the false disguise of Western culture and religion.¹⁰¹

Rosenberg's Orphic vision, then, reveals his firm belief in the power of art and poetry. Maud Bodkin described the significance of the Orphic myth as follows:

Entering imaginatively into the full significance of the story, one must, it seems to me, feel the longing for love as a poet feels it who has power within the sphere of his art.¹⁰²

sign of 'new hearing'. But she considered that as part of Rosenberg's image of the female as shelter and haven (p. 109).

⁹⁹ "Sonnets to Orpheus" (I, I,1-4), quoted in Segal, originally translated by James Blair. Leishman, *Rainer Maria Rilke* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954-60), forthcoming quotations from Rilke are from this translation also.

¹⁰⁰ Segal, p. 118.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.137.

¹⁰² Bodkin, p. 202.

Bodkin here is half-way to truth if her words are to be applied to Rosenberg's Orphic theme. The power of art suggested is two-fold: First, it is true that art becomes a realm of compensation, a surrogate. Second, because the Orphic power of art turns out to be unreal in terms of compensation, it can be also seen as a power of psychological insight; that is, art becomes an imaginative way of releasing and compensating for suppressed unconscious desires. Important here is the psychological aspect of the myth. Orpheus's journey to the underworld symbolises the journey to the unconscious and his crossing the barriers of earth and 'death' symbolises also the ability to transcend the boundaries of consciousness by means of transcendental powers of the mind. Hence the Orphic poem is a response to the unconscious and, at the same time, an account of how poetry becomes so; that is, a theory and an application. The previous sense of 'essencing' language alludes to this power of the mind; the universe is placed into a context of thought, by means of a language in which the equivocal is to be heard rather than seen; hence 'hearing' becomes an advanced mode of perception which transcends appearances towards the internal aspects of the observed phenomena.

However, these 'internal' dimensions of the Orphic voice are meant to reflect on the external reality, the social scene, whether on the political, religious, literary or social level. The harmonising Orphic power is meant to heal a breach in the individual's self by placing the universe in which he lives into a context of reassessment and change. Then, the Orphic vision attempts social change at large, though it approaches it through the individual. Therefore, there needs to be an awareness of Rosenberg's external contextual domains, literary, social, political, religious and racial, to be used as the background for his adoption of an Orphic voice and even to understand such a context by help of the Orphic vision itself, since it places the external world into a context of 'thought', understanding and evaluation. This involves the disintegrated literary consensus that needs to be harmonised, diffused social classes and even religions. That is, like his psychological parallels with Freud, Rosenberg's Orphic vision is concerned with other major dimensions of his poetry, such as class, criticism and tradition. The next chapter will attempt to widen the margins for tracing such dimensions, in relation to class.

Chapter Four

The Working-class Jew and the Ordeal of Gentile Civility

It is uncertain how much Rosenberg's working-class origins and Jewishness contributed to his comparative oblivion between the two wars, but it is not a factor to be dismissed.

Jon Silkin¹

Rosenberg and the Working Class

It is a commonplace to observe that Isaac Rosenberg was a working-class Jew. Earlier studies of his work have detected in "A Ballad of Whitechapel", "Dawn Behind Night", "Fleet Street" and *Moses*, though in different terms, a working-class sentiment, interpreting them (in the light of themes on poverty and lack of opportunity) as vehicles for personal feelings of social injustice.² But despite this, Rosenberg's understanding and treatment of the working-class theme maintained distinctive perceptions from those of his Gentile 'comrades', a distinction that singles out his Jewish mentality. This will be the concern of the second section. The present section sets out the affinities in order to provide a solid basis for seeing how distinctive Rosenberg is.

The term 'working-class poet (writer)' is used in this study in the sense of a poet who belongs to the working class and who not only shares with the members of his class their environment, distinctive setting, lifestyle, ideals, manners of conduct, financial difficulties, economic constraints, deprivation, social and political feelings of inferiority, injustice, lack of power and unfair advantage; health, education and housing problems and the corresponding public services; and whose poetry (writing/art) responds to these aspects. This study does not attempt to suggest

¹ 1 Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), pp. 273-74.

² See for example Richard Anderson, "Isaac Rosenberg - A Critical Study of his Plays and Poems", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Leicester, 1975, pp. 52-54; V. M. R. Tallett, "Visionary and Revolutionary Impulses in the Works of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, Univ. of Leeds, 1991, pp. 54-55; 58-59. See also Jon Silkin "The Forgotten Poet Of Anglo-Jewry". *Jewish Chronicle*, (August. 1960), pp. 17; 22, and Silkin's "The War, The Class and the Jews". *Stand.* Vol. IV (1960), pp. 35-8.

certain names as candidates for this term, though recent research in the field has dedicated fuller investigation of the matter, with regards to certain periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³ The term is used here in line with the attempt to show the circumstances of the working-class poet in Rosenberg's time, and the extent to which this would have influenced his life, poetry and recognition. And because some circumstances differ - whether in nature or degree - from one poet to another, the following discussion merely tackles the general shared elements, while subtler specifications are incorporated through close analysis of Rosenberg's own life and poetry.

It has been suggested that the working class consider literature a realm of personal vocation; that is, to address personal concerns which are themselves representations of their working-class conditions.⁴ Poetry, literature in the larger sense, was sought as a means of compensation, self-satisfaction and affirmation. As Martha Vicinus puts it: "poetry was an ever-present personal consolation" being "a more personal alternative to politics, religion, temperance and of the more familiar working-class institutions."⁵ The same tendency is evident in Rosenberg who asserted that "I like to think of myself as a poet," (*CW*, 269) and who told Mrs Trevelyan "I must say that it has made me very happy to know that you like my work so much ... and I believe I am a poet." (*CW*, 245) Nevertheless, this does not constitute a solid basis for claiming a possible affinity with the working-class tradition for it might be true of any poet that poetry is sought as a means of satisfying personal desires, one of which is, of course, recognition.

³ On this issue see -Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996); Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Literary Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1994); Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974); Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Paddy Maguire et al, *The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing*, ed. Dave Morley and Ken Worpole (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1982); Dick Hobbs, *Doing the Business: Entrepreneurship, the Working Class, and Detectives in the East End of London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Ken Worpole, *Reading by Numbers: Contemporary Publishing and Popular Fiction* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1984); Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading: Popular Writing* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴ Vicinus, p.140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

For the working-class poet, verse was considered “the highest form of creativity, and seemed the ideal medium of personal thought.”⁶ Rosenberg asserted that in writing poetry he was “craving for self-expression” (*CW*, 180), while at the same time admitting his awareness that the task of doing so is not as easy as it might appear: “Art is not a plaything, it is blood and tears, it must grow up with one.” (*CW*, 193) Hence poetry is not mere talent and education is a serious necessity. Being working class, the poet could not even have enough time for ‘strict’ education; the high price of books may also have constituted an obstacle.⁷ Rosenberg frequently complained about his lack of culture; “you mustn’t forget the circumstances I was brought up in, the little education I have had. No body ever put poetry in my way.” (*CW*, 181) It is almost as if poetry is figured as an obstacle rather than a means of potential liberation. He also repeatedly ‘begged’ and thanked his friends and patrons for books; to Mr. Sydney Schiff he said: “I wonder whether you have any of his [Gordon Bottomley’s] plays to send me” (*CW*, 238); he was grateful to Winifreda Seaton who sent him a book on the Metaphysicals, (“thanks so much for the Donne.” (*CW*, 183) and later he wrote again (“thanks for copying those things to me.” (*CW*, 209). Still, however, he had the advantage of the Whitechapel Library, which provided him, and many others like him, with the sources they needed.⁸ He shared with the working class their lack of time; while feeling a need and desire for ‘self expression’ he found himself “chained to this fiendish mangling-machine”. (*CW*, 180) There is a possible allusion to Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* here, particularly to Sloppy, the mangler, in a representative East End setting:

It was then perceived to be a small home with a large mangle in it, at the handle of which machine stood a very long boy, with a very little head, and an open mouth of disproportionate capacity that seemed to assist his eyes in staring at the visitors.⁹

⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

⁸ H. L. Hawkins, “Whitechapel: The Reference Library”, in *The Jewish Chronicle*, December, 7th, 1951, p. 23. See also Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives*, p. 95.

⁹ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1891), book I, chapter 16, p. 160.

While on the front he told Rodker "I would like to read Elliott's work but I hardly get a chance to read the letters sent to me." (*CW*, 268).¹⁰

The common lack of but desire for education brought about an awareness of the need to share and exchange knowledge, experience and evaluation. "Writers formed literary circles to teach and encourage each other."¹¹ During the Whitechapel stage of his life, Rosenberg used to be a member of a group of East-End painters and writers known as 'the Whitechapel boys'; at the gallery next to the Whitechapel library, Rosenberg became a friend of David Bomberg, Mark Gertler, Mark Weiner and Maurice Goldstein, "all young Jews living in the Stepney area... All had passionate concern for art, which was to carry them through difficulties facing young men of their background, no money and no contacts, who aspired to become professional painters"; at the library he became a friend of John Rodker, Joseph Leftwich and Samuel Winsten, a poet and later a biographer of George Bernard Shaw.¹² Nevertheless, the circles with which he was involved never reached the stage of becoming established working-class writers associations such as those successful groups in "Manchester, Bradford, Barnsley, Nottingham and Blackburn," areas of textile industry with large working-class communities.¹³ There might be good reasons for this. A partial explanation might be that Rosenberg maintained a strong commitment to his own personal points of view and never compromised them for the sake of a circle; hence he appeared to Jean Liddiard as having a habit of frequently breaking up with groups he was involved with.¹⁴

¹⁰ The reference to 'Elliott' here is ambiguous; Ian Parsons, the editor of Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), considered this reference to be "presumably to T. S. Eliot" (p. 268, note No.1) However, it is possible, due to its spelling, that it refers to the poet Ebenezer Elliott, whose poetry was of major importance to the working class for, Vicinus argues, his political concerns appealed to them. See Vicinus, pp. 168-170.

¹¹ Vicinus, p. 140.

¹² See Hawkins, Parsons, p. 194 (note no. 1), and Jean Liddiard, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half-Used Life* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), pp. 41; 42; 45.

¹³ Vicinus, p. 141.

¹⁴ Liddiard, p. 45.

The working-class poet was responsible for teaching himself, a responsibility subject to circumstances.¹⁵ This was a difficult and demanding task which meant for Rosenberg 'blood and tears' as he was also, to use Vicinus's terms, both an uneducated and a self-educated poet. As Liddiard puts it:

His [Rosenberg] lack of confidence, not in his abilities, but in his education, made him turn to those like Dainow, a librarian, or Winfreda Seaton, a middle-aged schoolteacher he met at a friend's studio, whom he felt would make the world of literature and art accessible to him... she introduced him to the metaphysical poets... Morley Dainow introduced Rosenberg to the established Victorian poets, Tennyson, Browning and the more recent Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Swinburne.¹⁶

But it must be noted that some of the problems, from which the working class suffered earlier, were raised and, to some extent, dealt with by his time. The formation of the Society of the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) in 1826 with the aim of providing inexpensive knowledge to the working class by, for example, establishing *The Penny Magazine* is a realisation of the working-class's lack of education.¹⁷ However, on the first page of the first number of *The Penny Magazine*, it was made clear that the aim of the SDUK was not to empower the working class politically.¹⁸ This played a role in the establishment of some periodicals as *The People's Paper* which was devoted to working-class "views of politics, culture and religion."¹⁹ As for the idea of being provided with knowledge, Rosenberg, though maintained similar needs and problems, lived at a time when these matters started to be treated; the development of new cheaper methods of production and distribution of printed materials after 1850s, and the extension of education and literacy are all examples of how working-class lack of knowledge was

¹⁵ Vicinus argued that they were called 'the uneducated poets' - which showed that they lacked education - and that they were also frequently referred to as 'the self-educated poets', which suggested that they did teach themselves. See Vicinus, pp. 168; 178.

¹⁶ Liddiard, pp. 39-40.

¹⁷ Murphy, p. 1.

¹⁸ 31 March, 1832, p. 1.

¹⁹ Murphy, p. 1.

being neutralised.²⁰ As for education, William Edward Forster's Elementary Education Act of 1870, McAleer argued, extended education by making it compulsory to children to the age of ten, and when fees were abolished in 1891, the influence of this act became more efficient.²¹ Forster, a statesman, introduced his Elementary Education Bill in February 1870, proposing to create a local authority called the School Board to have a power for providing school accommodation, and in 1873 Forster struggled to defend another related proposal for compulsory education, sufficient school accommodation having in his opinion been provided for an effectual application of the principle. McAleer added that as a consequence of this act, "The year 1870 is often cited as a watershed in the history of publishing in Britain... Overnight - or so it seemed - the masses were literate and demanded copious amount of reading matter," hence "the characteristic of this period is, indeed, 'cheapness', for it was through a fall in retail prices and costs of production that reading, and the publishing industry, expanded."²² But it was argued that such developments provided 'cheaper knowledge', and therefore Joseph Ackland wrote on "Elementary Education and the Decay of Literature", complaining against emerging "fields of fancy and pleasure."²³

The previous idea of the establishment of literary circles meant achieving the support of friends which "would often lead a poet to publish a volume of verse."²⁴ Such an ambition sprang from a strong desire for recognition; and since these poets "eagerly accepted any attention they received as justly deserved"²⁵ Rosenberg's reaction at Mrs Trevelyan's appreciation of his poetry is understandable: "I think I am a poet". He told Miss Lowy: "you can imagine what a rare pleasure it is to me when people appreciate my efforts" (*CW*, 185), and similarly, he responded to Marsh's appreciation of his work saying "you don't know how encouraging that is."

²⁰ McAleer also suggested that the abolition of 'taxes on knowledge' in 1861 had a major effect on working class literacy, pp. 12;14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²² *Ibid.*, p.12.

²³ Quoted in McAleer, p 13. originally from Joseph Ackland, "Elementary Education and the Decay of Literature" in *The Nineteenth Century*, 35 (March 1894), p. 423.

²⁴ Vicinus, p. 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

(*CW*, 202) Responding to a similar appreciation, he told Gordon Bottomley: “if you really mean what you say in your letter, there is no need to tell you how proud I am.” (*CW*, 236) To Marsh he also said: “it greatly pleases me ... that this child of my brain [*Moses*] should be seen and his beauties discovered.” (*CW*, 253). At the beginning of his literary and artistic life he kept sending his work to people whose recognition he sought: Ezra Pound, Edward Marsh, Laurence Binyon, Winifreda Seaton, Izrael Zangwil, Cyril Picciotto, Alice Wright, Austin Harrison, Hobrook Jackson, Michael Sherbrooke, Sydney Schiff, R. C. Trevelyan, John Rodker, Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Ruth Lowy, Dr. Eder, Ernest Lesser, Joseph Leftwich, Joseph Cohen and Mrs. Cohen. These indications of a strong desire for acknowledgement as a poet materialised in urgent efforts to get his work published. Despite his severe financial problems, he privately printed *Night and Day*, a 24-page pamphlet of poems, in 1912; three years later he published *Youth*, followed by *Moses: A Play* in 1916.²⁶ Selling copies to friends, his major concern was less to make money than to publicise his work. He always believed that “an artist who depends on his art for his living must be an advertiser” (*CW*, 302); the extreme of this point of view his belief that commercial art is a kind of prostitution. (*CW*, 275)

As he says in his prose-piece *Rudolph*, “Propaganda is a necessary evil,” (*CW*, 280) alluding to the working-class artist’s need to do his own advertising. Thus, he sought to promote his work in his letters; to Mr. Schiff he wrote: “I have already sent my poems to the printer and you will have a copy in about 2 weeks. But I am sending poems I wrote before I was 20 and I leave you to pick out anything good in them.” (*CW*, 213) And he later told Schiff “I have other copies of those poems I sent to you so you needn’t return them.” (*CW*, 230). This raises the need to examine the question of publication, reviews and patronage.

Critics have suggested that the fact that his work was not available till 1937, influenced Rosenberg’s contemporary recognition. Fred Crawford argued that such

²⁶ These works were printed by Israel Narodiczky, of 48 Mile End Road, who used to print under the name ‘The Paragon Printing Works’. The title page of *Moses* reads “printed by the Paragon Printing Works, 8 Ocean Street, Stepney Green E.” which Ian Parsons said was thought to be an imprint

neglect “resulted from the timing of the posthumous editions which seemed to miss the periods of interest in the war and its poets.”²⁷ This first edition of *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, Charles Eglinton noted later, was out of print so that “once a new edition of his work is available, it is more than likely that he will be re-discovered.”²⁸ In 1920, T. S. Eliot complained that the reading public “has never heard of the poems of T. E. Hulme or of Isaac Rosenberg”; the fault lay in each case with ‘the publisher’. He claimed that the public “will see, in the end, that the disease of contemporary reviewing is only a form of radical malady of journalism”.²⁹ Rosenberg was always aware that a writer can not be recognised and appreciated without his work being available to readers and critics, and hence he was always keen to publish his work. Rosenberg’s ‘complete’ works, except for a selection of poems edited by Gordon Bottomley in 1922, was unavailable until 1937 when Bottomley and D. W. Harding edited *The Complete Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto and Windus). Later in 1984, Ian Parsons edited a new edition of Rosenberg’s collected works; this once more is out of print.³⁰

Because Rosenberg’s work appeared sporadically, earlier reviews lack awareness of his work as a whole; indeed, it is accurate to say that he was anthologised fragmentarily, since in *Georgian Poetry 1916-17*, Marsh included only a short section from *Moses*. Rosenberg was aware that such a way of publishing his work would negatively influence his reputation as a poet. He wrote to Leftwich in 1918: “Do you know that when the Georgian B. [Book] will be out? I am only having about half a page in it - and it is only an extract from a poem - I do not think any one will be much the wiser.” (*CW*, 267) And in a letter to Rodker in the same year he told him about his contribution in the *Georgian Book* describing it as “fragmentary and I think it were better left out” (*CW*, 269). Edward Shanks’s review of this poem, as it appeared later in *Poems by Isaac Rosenberg*, confirms this:

established by Reuben Cohen, a friend of Rosenberg’s, who used Narodiczky’s printing machines and who set the type of *Night and Day* and *Moses*. See Parsons, pp. 212; 231.

²⁷ Fred Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War*, (London: Associate Univ. Press, 1988), p. 202.

²⁸ Eglinton, p. 16.

²⁹ T. S. Eliot, “A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry”, Poetry Bookshop Chapbook, 1920.

³⁰ Ian Parsons (ed.), *The Collected Works Of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), repr. 1984.

Nearly five years ago, Mr. Edward Marsh published in the third series of 'Georgian Poetry' a song beginning 'Ah Koelue' which was signed with the unfamiliar name Isaac Rosenberg. It was exceedingly obscure, apparently not very good; and several persons, I among them, in their perplexity were inclined to think slightly of it...

[In *Poems by Isaac Rosenberg*] we find that curious song in its proper place is part of a speech made by Moses in a play named after him; and though I now own that I was wrong in slighting it, I think I may be excused for my wrongness. It was snatched out of its context and made to seem as though its obscurity were of that sort which hides emptiness of thought and feeling such it now clearly is not.³¹

The title of Shanks' review, "A Georgian Poet", points to a related problem in the reviews: the misidentification of Rosenberg as a Georgian. Further, Rosenberg was accused of obscurity. Charles Powell considered him "The Obscure Poet", saying that he "says something which he himself cannot interpret."³² Later reviewers referred to 'incompleteness', rather than obscurity, describing Rosenberg, neutrally. James Stephens claimed "that Rosenberg was a promising young writer is evident."³³

Laura Riding and Robert Graves stressed Rosenberg's originality and attacked the accusation of obscurity levelled at his work, relating it to a 'high-minded' attitude:

So cautious and suspicious... is the whole reading population, the critics and readers, that a poet like Isaac Rosenberg can pass them by altogether. Isaac Rosenberg was one of the few poets who might have served as a fair challenge to sham modernism. He had, one would say, everything to commend him... But he was not celebrated and for this reason: the two editors of his posthumous volume, Mr. Bottomley and Mr. Binyon, both 'safe' poets, introduced him merely as a poet of promise killed in defence of his country....³⁴

Edwin Muir also spoke of Rosenberg's 'individual utterance':

³¹ Edward Shanks, "A Georgian Poet" in *Daily News* (1 June, 1922).

³² Charles Powell, "The Obscure Poet" in *The Manchester Guardian* (1 August, 1922).

³³ *The Sunday Times* (4 July, 1937).

³⁴ Laura Riding and Robert Graves (eds.) *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), pp. 220-23.

When his own utterance comes through... it is the utterance of a great poet; how great we cannot perhaps realise yet. His death was a major tragedy in English literature.³⁵

In *The Observer*, Wilfred Gibson wrote:

Rosenberg was working through traditional formulas to a highly original form of his own. The seemingly incoherence and the verbal incongruity were not due to slackness, but rather to a strenuous effort to attain individual expression.³⁶

Reviews in Jewish journals celebrated the achievement of Rosenberg as a Jewish writer; Emanuel Letvinoff said that Rosenberg's poems:

ensure Rosenberg a secure place in English poetry, not merely as one of those rare English Jews who have written in this medium, but as a poet who used the language of Shakespeare and used it well.³⁷

Nonetheless, reviews stated, but did not overcome, the neglect of Rosenberg.

Both publishing and patronage had a similar purpose: the control of the literary market. "Because upper classes largely controlled the publishing houses and literary journals, writers trimmed their verse to suit them"; and "the difficulties of patronage," Vicinus alleged, resulted in "the distortion of the poets' verse and life."³⁸ The working-class poet sought the patron's help to find a job such as a journalist, which meant avoiding physically exhausting work and joining the learned community, and finding a publisher.³⁹ Such motives beyond the need to have a patron draw the attention to the patron's great importance to the poet; the patron could help the poet achieve recognition and better life, by enabling him to pass the margins of his class. In other words, the patron's support is so important that paying a high price for it is likely to be accepted. Hence, it is not surprising to find Vicinus

³⁵ *The Scotsman* (22 July, 1937).

³⁶ *The Observer* (4 July, 1937); see E. O. G. Davies, "Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Nottingham, 1957, p. 216.

³⁷ *The Jewish Chronicle* (12 May, 1950).

³⁸ Vicinus, p.141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

reporting the tendency to encourage working-class poets “who accepted middle-class superiority.”⁴⁰

Consequently, the relation with the patron meant an act of obedience on the part of the poet encountered by an act of sympathy on the part of the patron, sympathy contingent upon obedience. And it was more than likely that the poet would be “dropped when he showed signs of independence or of overstepping his situation in life.”⁴¹ Rosenberg’s eagerness to achieve a patron’s sympathy is clear in his letters. To Miss Seaton he complained about the hard circumstances in which he lived; willing to write poetry but impeded by long-working hours, “all these hours”, during which, as quoted earlier, he was chained to a “fiendish-mangling machine, without hope”, and thus poetry becomes an “application deadened by the fiendish persistence of the coil of circumstances.” (*CW*, 180-181) He asked his patrons not to “forget the circumstances I was brought up in, the little education I have had.” (*CW*, 181) To them he complained that “nothing is more discouraging than the writing of poetry,” (*CW*, 185) if one is not recognised as a poet. To gain the sympathy of Laura Binyon, he told her “you will see from that that my circumstances have not been favourable for artistic production; but I generally am optimistic, I suppose because I am young and do not properly realise the difficulties.” (*CW*, 192) After achieving the sympathy of patrons, he had to respond to their orders.

He tried to be diplomatic in responding to their comments and criticism, for he remained in need of their help. How could it be otherwise when being so meant hunger and loss of any hope for reputation? He once told Marsh that “I love poetry - but just now the finest poem ever written would not move me as the writing on that cheque.” (*CW*, 210). Therefore, when he shows humility and accepts criticism of his patrons, it turns out that financial needs are involved; to Mrs. Cohen he said: “I am very sorry I have disappointed you” and a few lines later continued that “I cannot conceive who gave you the idea that I had such big notions of myself” while asserting that “I feel very grateful for your interest in me.” (*CW*, 193) It is clear here

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 168.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 177.

that Rosenberg was unable to say explicitly that his patrons' criticism did not sound convincing to him; such feelings push themselves through his, consciously or unconsciously, sarcastic mode: "If you tell me what was expected of me I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing by how much I have erred." (*CW*, 193) It appears at the end of the letter that money is involved: "I should like all the money advanced on me considered as a loan." (*CW*, 193). He told Cohen that he had rejected the criticism of Mr Lesser (who never was a patron of his) but still he added:

[Y]ou can call me rude, ungentlemanly, ungrateful etc. ... You know I am not in a position to gain anything - I mean I can only be the loser by being so. Naturally I am concerned at being thought all this by people I respect, but as I, being ignorant of the existence of the qualities to go to make the opposite, can't be expected to agree with them. (*CW*, 195-96)

While talking about rejecting criticism of which he was not convinced, his humble language with Mrs. Cohen is kept till the end, not only showing readiness to accept Cohen's criticism but also criticising himself in the same manner of his patrons, though trying to justify: "I don't think I'd be far wrong if I attributed the unfinished quality of my picture to the mental and physical looseness so caused." (*CW*, 196) All this turns out to be an introduction for a concluding apology for delay in paying back his debts: "I shall return the £2 you lent me for printing." (*CW*, 196) Other cases of self-humiliation are numerous and, though the financial concern is not always explicit in them, it seems that it had never been out of mind; Rosenberg asserted that an artist "is either a gentleman, or must subsist on patronage." (*CW*, 217) He also told Miss Wright "I should be much obliged for a criticism." (*CW*, 190), where an account of his works' 'poverty' might bring with it a welcome remittance. Diplomacy was essential for him; when he finds a job, and thinks of himself financially secure, he says "I was learning to do work that I would not be put to all sorts of shifts and diplomatics." (*CW*, 217). Appreciation of his work was accompanied by accusation of obscurity; hence he cried for Cohen "for God's sake! don't say they are obscure." (*CW*, 210) While at the beginning, his need for the sympathy of the patron makes him utter a statement such as "I can't look at things in the simple, large way that great poets do," (*CW*, 180) he later suggested, in what appears to be a 'simple large way of a great poet' that he is no longer ignorant by offering a definition of "simple poetry - that is, where an interesting complexity of

thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable.” (*CW*, 238) Lack of agreement with his patrons necessitated sometimes rejecting their views, especially when it meant giving up his own poetic principles and adopting theirs. But even in these cases he remains aware of the dangers of violating the dictates of the patron, as his words to Miss Wright show:

I think I’ve been saying that in all my letters to you - but I really am in a very serious situation. I have thrown my patrons they were so unbearable, and as I can’t do commercial work, and I have no other kind of work to show, it puts me in a fix. (*CW*, 197)

Awareness of such a consequence might account for the maintained ironic sense in his letters where he seems to be disagreeing with his patrons and at the same time seems to be admitting personal ignorance; asked for developing a ‘healthy style’, he wonders “do you feel ill when you see my work;”(*CW*, 194) and to Mrs Cohen he said:

You did ask me whether I had been working hard, and I was so taken back at the question that I couldn’t think what to say. If you did not think the work done sufficient evidence, what had I to say? (*CW*, 193)

He found himself forced to join the army, “never from patriotic reasons,” (*CW*, 227) nor because he “had to forswear my fatherland” (that his father was a Russian Jew, suggests that such land would be Russia, but more likely Zion, (*CW*, 218), but because “there is certainly a strong temptation to join when you are making no money.” (*CW*, 214) Nevertheless, this solution failed and he remained in need of his patrons’ help and appreciation. It was after he told Miss Wright of his having thrown his patrons away, that he started writing letters to them, apologising for not having written for a long time, realising his need for maintaining their help. While in France he wrote:

If I was taciturn in England I am 10 times so here; our struggle to express ourselves is a fearful joke. However our wants are simple, our cash is scarce, and our time is precious. (*CW*, 245)

In other words, joining the army did not solve his problem nor did it save him the need for a patron for he still desired recognition, and needed ‘cash’ and time. Thus,

this '10 times taciturn' becomes a possible suggestion of being obliged to keep his earlier diplomatic way of addressing his patrons, a suggestion strengthened by the fact that Rosenberg frequently asserted that his belief in insinuation; in his words, "suggestiveness, an[d] accident that is the consequence of intention." (CW, 182) He eagerly sought patrons' help but he never arrived at a situation to trust mere reliance on it and hence was always keen to publish his work in every possible means and to defend its personal nature. He came to understand that his need for a patron meant achieving the latter's help to express one's own self and not the patron's.

The question of genre, the choice of poetry and verse drama and dissatisfaction with the novel and stage drama is a further aspect of Rosenberg's relation to the working-class context of his time. The appreciation of such a context reflected a dissatisfaction with the novel, partially because fiction was considered "not truth".⁴² However, other reasons might have contributed to this dissatisfaction; working-class writers lacked time and thus, Vicinus asserted, used to write between periods of work and in their leisure time; it is true that they were part-time poets who desired to become full-timers; and hence poetry suited their conditions better than novels for, unlike novels, "its demands were not great in terms of plotting, characterisation and form."⁴³ In addition, the need for an audience necessitated paying attention to its circumstances, a realisation of the readers' lack of time to read lengthy works as novels. It might be also that the novel seemed to be associated with the leisured classes.⁴⁴ And this is basically what the conditions of the audience would generate, especially in a period when literary forms were subject to the influence of economic conditions; as James Sparkes puts it: "the history of publishing market suggests that literary norms compete economically."⁴⁵ Ken

⁴² Earlier studies of working-class literature have sought to figure out working-class literary principles by means of implicit references in works of literature by or for the working class, such as Vicinus and also Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Men, 1830–1850* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963); however, Murphy's recent study sought such principles and values in working-class literary journals, to focus "upon the explicitly stated literary values found in hundreds of periodicals written by and for the working class"; for more on this see Murphy, pp. 2ff; see also p. 5 and for mores see pp. 62-69.

⁴³ Vicinus, p. 140.

⁴⁴ McAleer (p. 244), suggested that even for the working-class, the novel was a leisure activity; however, when the working-class suffered lack of leisure time, it became an activity for the leisured classes.

Worpole asserted how, economically speaking, writing was more convenient to the working class, an assertion which shows that, within writing itself, genre was also economically determined:

Writing is also initially an activity that requires little financial output, unlike other forms of cultural creativity such as painting, film-making or music making. It can be done, as once again the case of Jane Austen illustrates, with a notebook in a locked drawer.⁴⁶

Significantly, Rosenberg, who, as presented earlier, was forced to give up painting due to its demands such as equipment and time, had similar dissatisfaction with prose:

Prose is so diffuse and has not the advantages of poetry ... There is so much unessential writing one puts in a novel and yet which must be there, at the same time, that makes me regard novel writing as a mistaken art. (CW, 240)

And in trying to account for what seemed to him a cultural crisis due to the dominance of material values on the industrial modern world where “the philistine has become the romanticist, and the *poet* the philistine”, he comes to assert again, in *On A Door Knock*, that novel writing is a ‘mistaken art’:

We read novels, true; but they are... dreadfully realistic, so as to get more zest from the romance of life, by contrast with this ugly realism. (CW, 274)

Novels appeared to him as a realisation of the problem and an escape from it. Having an Orphic vision, Rosenberg wanted art to help the individual realise the problem to become able to perform his own metamorphosis, reject the reality and try to change rather than escape from it. But it must be noted that Rosenberg mentions ‘reading’ attitudes here. Indeed, this dissatisfaction is a reflection on the reading attitudes of the time, which McAleer described as follows: “the reasons why people

⁴⁵ James Sparkes, “The History of the Anglo-Jewish Community”, in *A Minority in Britain: Social Studies of the Anglo-Jewish Community*, ed. Maurice Freedman (London: Valentine, Mitchell and Co., Ltd, 1955), p. 15.

⁴⁶ Worpole, *Reading by Numbers*, p. 32.

read... do not seem to change: 'escapism' appears to have remained the principle motive... and popular fiction was labelled 'escapist'.⁴⁷

However, a contradiction might occur when saying that working-class literary ideals rejected the novel because of, as Vicinus suggested, its greater demands of plotting and characterisation while at the same time verse drama with its almost similar demands was elevated. Indeed, it is for this reason that Vicinus's suggestion was earlier considered a partial cause. Another reason why verse drama was still preferred was because of its dependence on poetry when to the working-class literary sensibility poetry was "the highest form of creativity."⁴⁸ And as for the reason why closet drama, the form of drama intended to be read, was preferred over performance or stage drama, Murphy suggested, it was because "working-class literary journalists felt that staged drama could not serve the working-class in the way fiction or poetry could," and thus working-class press sought to compensate for the public's 'thirst' by publishing drama in the journals themselves.⁴⁹ However, it might be also that the circumstances of the audience demanded it; reading a play in a working-class periodical was cheaper than attending the stage, and finding it in a newspaper meant reading it when there was time for doing so and thus not missing its performance on the stage. Hence the claims that Rosenberg's drama was a failure (as it cannot be staged) lack awareness of the fact that it might be seen in light of working-class critics' condemnation of performance drama and, instead their approval of it as a printed literary form.⁵⁰

Lacking education and eagerly trying to educate themselves, and thus coming into contact with other poetic experiences, masters or peers, and through books, circles, patrons or personal relations, the working-class poets' view of the nature of poetry witnessed a growth and refinement, as opposed to early stages when they

⁴⁷ McAleer, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴⁹ Murphy, p. 6; for more see also pp. 149-163.

⁵⁰ On this issue see Lee Erickson, p. 150 and Murphy, p. 149; As for those who considered it so, see Marius Bewley, "The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg" in *Commentary*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January, 1949), p. 39; Davies, p. 118; Avner Azriel Fellner, "The Life and Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, George Washington Univ., 1963, p. 105.

“never considered themselves anything more than poetasters.”⁵¹ Similarly Rosenberg, as presented earlier, wondered “who gave you the idea that I had such big notions of myself (*CW*, 193), and asserted that “I can’t look at poetry in the simple, large way the great poets do”(*CW*, 180) and confessed that “what people call technique is a very real thing ... My technique in poetry is very clumsy I know;” (*CW*, 216) he also announced that “I am not going to refute your criticism. In literature I have no Judgement - at least for style, ... my ignorance of grammar etc., makes me accept that.” (*CW*, 202) This means that the working-class poets practised imitation in their early stages. But their realisation of their own class distinction had a role to play in their imitations.

When poetry was considered a means of mere self-satisfaction and pleasure, when recognition was still a far away dream and when awareness of class inferiority and feelings of social injustice started to push for expression, it was natural to adopt poetic ideals that celebrated the working class, such as those in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* which venerates spontaneous composition of poetry, the real language of men and depicts labour, common people and common places. It is not surprising that such abhorrence of poetic-diction and ‘education’, was held in high esteem by proletarian writers, for this meant a compensation for their unrefined, immature and uneducated poetic experience. The Romantics appeared as their comrades.⁵²

⁵¹ Vicinus., p. 141.

⁵² This sense of comradeship was the motive beyond the working-class poets’ admiration of Byron and Shelley and the so-called ‘Burns-syndrome’.(Ibid., p. 141) They found in these poets, though indeed in different levels and terms, preoccupation with working-class issues and thus, due to different parentage, Shelley and Byron came to be considered ‘honorary working-class members and comrades’ while Burns was seen as a brother and “the first true working-class poet”.(See Murphy, p. 140; 146; for more see pp. 135-148; see also Vicinus, pp. 141-142). As for Burns, Vicinus argued that “many had careers similar to his own on a smaller scale. They went to work at an early age, gained education with great difficulty, wrote verse for friends in pubs for a number of years, and then published a serious work with the help of a patron.”(Vicinus, p. 141). Murphy asserted that Shelley, Byron and Burns “formed the core of a working-class poetic canon,” as reflected in working-class journal’s publication of these poets’ work; Shelley features so much in *Nationale: A Library for the People*, edited by William James Linton, a Chartist poet and journalist; Byron appeared frequently in *The Northern Star*.(Murphy, pp. 57-8; 136-9; see also *The Nationale: A Library for the People*, ed. William James Linton, 5 January- 25 June 1839; *The Northern Star*, eds. William Hill (1837-43), Joshua Hobson (1843-4), George Julian Harney (1845-50) William Rider and G. A. Fleming (1850-52), 18 November 1837- 24 April 1852) Shelley’s “Song to the Men of England”, “Queen Mab” and *The Revolt of Islam* and excerpts from Byron’s “Don Juan” were favourite selections for working-class journalists.(Murphy, pp. 141-2). Burns’s poems, with their working-class grounding dialect,

Earlier studies of Rosenberg's poetry agreed on his early preoccupation with Romantic poetry, suggesting that Keats, Shelley, Blake, Tennyson, Browning and Wordsworth have influenced him, and Joseph Cohen provided the first analysis of Rosenberg's romanticism. He stated that Rosenberg's "love for the Romantic poets," sprang from his dissatisfaction with the context of "his upbringing", sharing the romantics' revolt against patriarchal and materialistic nature of society and religion, and their preoccupation with man seeking perfection as a God.⁵³ In Rosenberg's "Expression", Cohen found a Romantic imagination freed from "oppressive order":

Call - call - and bruise the air:
 Shatter dumb space!
 Yea! We will fling this passion everywhere;
 Leaving no place
 ...
 Life's heart, a blossoming fire
 Blown bright by thought,
 While gleams and fades the infinite desire,
 Phantasmed naught.⁵⁴

The fifth line here seems to borrow from a line in Tennyson's "Maud": "The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire." (III, vi, iv, 53) which Rosenberg seems to have rewritten. Avner Azriel Fellner provided an elucidation of Cohen's argument, again stating that Rosenberg's early poetry can be seen as an "index to his personal life."⁵⁵ Fellner considered Rosenberg's attack against the city in "Fleet Street" an

were more quoted in Scots working-class periodicals. (Ibid., p. 145) Burns's closeness to the working class can be seen in the following piece in *The Northern Star*:

Giant-hearted Robert Burns, was the first in a kingly line, and the founder of a glorious dynasty of the people's poets. With his lamp, which was lit with fire from heaven, he descended into the lowliest human heart... He it was who sang "a man's a man for a' that"; and at the words the poor crushed masses felt the spirit of manhood stirring within them... He hoped our hopes, wept our tears, despaired our despairs, and his heart was pulsed by all our living impulses. The people lived in the large brave heart of Robert Burns, and we have taken him to live for ever and aye in the heart of the people. (*The Nationale*, 7 January 1852, p. 2).

⁵³ Joseph Cohen, "Isaac Rosenberg: From Romantic to Classic", *Tulane Studies in English*, 10, 1960, pp. 131; 133.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 134-5.

example of his "spiritual isolation from both God and nature... the truly beautiful, the truly pure, the truly infinite."⁵⁶ This is considered a Romantic celebration of man's infinity, which is part of Rosenberg's revolt against God, announcing that "My maker shunneth me" ("Spiritual Isolation"), the shelter being 'Nature', where the desired isolation materialises, as also in "The Poet (II)":

So shut in are our lives, so still
 ...
 A dead world since ourselves are dead.
 Till he, the master, speaks and lo!
 The dead world's shed,
 Strange winds, new skies and rivers flow.⁵⁷

Glenn Carnegie has investigated the Romantic nature of Rosenberg's poetry, suggesting that in *Night and Day*, the first published book of poetry, "most [poems] could legitimately be assigned to the category of simple Romantic lyric."⁵⁸ However, prior to Carnegie, Cohen and Fellner argued that Rosenberg's preoccupation with the Romantic ideals was not sustained. They instead asserted that he moved to

⁵⁵ Avner Azriel Fellner, "The Life and Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, George Washington Univ., 1963, p. 15. Indeed, this whole study of Rosenberg's development towards classicism away from the earlier romanticism is a development -an elucidation- of Cohen's article "*Isaac Rosenberg: from Romantic to Classic*", which appeared three years earlier than Fellner's study. Fellner adopted Hulme's definition of the terms 'romanticism' and 'classicism' and Cohen stated that Rosenberg's concepts of romanticism and classicism were influenced by Hulme's *Romanticism and Classicism*. (See Cohen, p. 132. Hulme's article appeared in *Speculations* (New York, 1924), pp. 110-40; Cohen stated that it is possible that Rosenberg and Hulme met and exchanged views). In discussing the 'Romantic Period' in Rosenberg's poetry, Fellner suggested an affinity between Rosenberg and the Georgians - though he thesis stressed that Rosenberg was not a Georgian - understating the major difference which he finds in Rosenberg's rejection of 'tradition'. (pp. 37-9) Rosenberg's romanticism, Fellner argued, was "interrupted by the war", adding that the "war was a catalyst" which necessitated a movement from the lyric to a structure which "was more classic". (pp. 46; 79). Fellner found that Rosenberg's romantic poetry "became primarily classical with moments of romantic wistfulness", having developed a sense of impersonality, and exploited Biblical and mythological figures, most of which are ideas which Cohen used to clarify Rosenberg's classicism. (p. 80; 95).

⁵⁶ Fellner, p. 48. Fleet Street was the centre of the newspaper industry. Nonetheless, it is central in terms of Rosenberg's working-class sentiment in relation to modern social criticism that attacked the masses when the disease of cultural decline that Arnold and F. R. Leavis complained from was generated by the rise of materialistic journalism. The matter is detailed in Chapter Five.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-62.

⁵⁸ Carnegie later said that even in his war poems, Rosenberg maintained a Romantic expression because "the trenches were not really that different from life in the East End of London," suggesting hence a relation between Rosenberg's life and poetry. Glenn Alan Carnegie, "*Isaac Rosenberg: From Innocence to Experience*", unpublished PhD Thesis. Univ. of Tulsa. 1984, p. 112. The title of Carnegie's thesis is a continuity of Cohen's article, just like Fellner's thesis. Carnegie makes this explicit through elucidated discussion of Cohen's article and even uses Cohen's title while placing his own in parentheses: "*From Romantic to Classic (Innocence to Experience)*", p. IV.

classicism due to the limitations of his early Romantic poetry and his need to adopt an ideal that overcame such limitations. This movement towards classicism is considered an attempt to achieve a kind of order for his work, by employing mythological figures, and to substitute imaginative attacks against outer reality in the sense of stating rather than distorting facts.⁵⁹ Cohen considered the poems with Biblical themes, such as “The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Hordes”, to be “thoroughly classical”; and Fellner referred to this same poem as an example of Rosenberg’s classicism, where the Biblical material is used as a background for the Great War.⁶⁰ This suggests that the Romantic ideal was revealed to Rosenberg as inappropriate for the aim for which he was heading; the achievement of real solutions, not imaginative escape, as discussed earlier.

Working-class poets needed time to change and refine their poetic sensibility as a result of realising the shortcomings of the present perception and trying to avoid it in the ideals to come. However, it must be stated that they maintained an awareness of their class ‘distinction’. And they started to consider poetry, Murphy argued, as an means of “further establishing an ideology for their class” in the sense of Terry Eagleton’s definition of it as “the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-reality of the society we live in.”⁶¹ Chartism, the working-class movement of 1830s, “believed that working-class people should produce their own literature, since established writers were incapable of creating a literature that gave full cognisance to the complex reality of everyday working-class life and politics.”⁶² Consequently, it was accepted that poets should serve their class both “aesthetically and politically”.⁶³ The result was a detour from the politically explicit

⁵⁹ See Cohen, p.135 and Fellner, p. 95, and Carnagey, pp. 264; 269-72. Cohen suggested that Rosenberg did not have a sharp break up with his earlier Romantic verse: “in the last four years of his life when he wrote the poems on which his reputation rests he was unable to choose decisively between romanticism and classicism. Much of the time he used the two simultaneously.” (p. 131). Fellner repeated this proposition, offering further examples. (pp. 80-95) Carnagey also argued that “Rosenberg seems to have created all the types of poems from the very beginning, and continued to do so until his death... the Ur-Modernist poems are dominant in his early poems”, as Rosenberg’s classicism can be seen in “Zion” and “Ode to David’s Harp”, his earliest poems. (pp. 264; 272)

⁶⁰ See Cohen, p. 139 and Fellner, pp. 103-4.

⁶¹ Murphy, p. 2. He quotes Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 14.

⁶² Maguire et al, p.68.

⁶³ Murphy, p. 2.

towards preferring the politically implicit in works of literature, an act which Murphy describes as “an important shift in awareness”, as it meant broadening their interest beyond mere appreciation of pure political works (such as the writings of Thomas Paine) to think about implicit political messages in literary works.⁶⁴ It seems that this shift owes much to the previously outlined problems of patronage and publishing, and the desire to be recognised not only among the masses but also among the other sects of the reading public. These poets, Vicinus asserted, wanted to “participate in English literary culture” at large.⁶⁵

Rosenberg believed in ‘suggestiveness’ which meant “an accident that is the consequence of intention”, and a sense “of something hidden and yet felt to be there”. (*CW*, 182; 260) Similar dissatisfaction with the politically explicit accompanies a reference to the intention to write a Jewish play: “I have thoughts of a play around our Jewish hero, Judas Maccabeus” (*CW*, 248); he says that Gordon Bottomley “has urged me to write Jewish plays. I am quite sure if I do I will be boycotted and excommunicated.” (*CW*, 247) Hence, Rosenberg’s working-class sensibility was never separated, in his mind, from his racial awareness. In his play *Moses*, a working-class sentiment is reflected in a working-class theme about slaves controlled by wealthy masters:

There is a famine in Egypt caused by superabundance of slaves who eat up all the food meant for the masters. To prevent this, all the back molars of the slaves are drawn, so they eat less. The plot works round this. (*CW*, 232)

The dental allusion here brings to the surface an important working-class sensibility, which the history of eduntualism reveals.⁶⁶ In ancient Egypt, dentures, luxuries available only to the wealthy aristocrats, were nevertheless so inefficient as to be removed while eating; hence aristocrats made use of the back molars of their slaves,

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 2-3; Murphy refers to the influence of Thomas Paine on the working class: “Paine presented himself... not just as an educator of the people, but also as the articulator of their basic political aspirations.”, p. 32; see pp. 32ff for more on Paine’s influence on the working class.

⁶⁵ Vicinus, p. 140.

⁶⁶ In the remarks that follow, I am indebted to George Zarb, “The Edentulous Milieu” in the *Journal of Prosthetic Dentistry*, vol. 49, no. 6 (1983), pp. 825-831.

and enjoyed a more efficient denture.⁶⁷ Doubtless, the play alludes to the Jewish exile in Egypt, the slaves being presented as Jews, the master as Pharaoh and the saviour as Moses. In “Dawn Behind Night”, to be detailed later, the working-class theme is accompanied by an allusion to a Jewish working-class; as mentioned earlier, “In the life or death they dole us from the rags and bones of their store,” Tallett recognised, alludes to the “rag-and-bone trade, (which many Jews were compelled to undertake).”⁶⁸ Rosenberg’s hope for a better future for the crushed working-class is presented within Jewish themes; in the poem “Zion”, the better future is considered to be in the city of Zion; and in “My Days”, representation of the better future is symbolised in a flower “whose beauty well repays its cost of tears”, an allusion to a major and central Zionist symbol for a coming relief. (See Chapter One). And the East End was not free from anti-Semitic attitudes during the time of Rosenberg; the case of Jack the Ripper, who, as Dick Hobbs and William Fishman asserted, was considered a Jew, is an example of how the Jews were looked down upon as inferior, immoral and criminal.⁶⁹

The Jewish Cockney: The Alter-ego of Modernity

O cockney who maketh negatives,
 You negative of negatives
 (“The Flea”)

Rosenberg lived in the East End of London which Fishman described as “an empire of hunger, a hell of poverty.”⁷⁰ Want and need maintained strong pressures on the individual. It was familiar in the streets of the East End to meet girls who, in trying to escape the sordid reality, “seek a male for bread and place.”⁷¹ Prostitution of young girls was widespread, especially among the unemployed, since this is “the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tallett, p. 58.

⁶⁹ Hobbs, p. 107; see also William J. Fishman, *The Streets of East End London* (London: Duckworth, 1979), pp. 102-102.

⁷⁰ Fishman, p.28.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 28.

only career in which the maximum wage is paid to the newest apprentice.”⁷² Housing crises were dominant due to the influx of the immigrants and this resulted in high rents.⁷³ In 47 Cable Street, Stepney, Rosenberg’s family lived in a one-room apartment. Rosenberg intimated his poetry to the context of his life and hence allusions to poverty, sickness, prostitution and the other issues that are related to working-class awareness, recur in his poetry, making record of these as indispensable characteristics of the working-class city life.

“A Ballad of Whitechapel” exhibits some of these allusions to uncover Rosenberg’s working-class sensibility. Invoked by feeling “God’s mercy shines,” he envisions “the monstrous mass that seethed and flowed/ Through one of London’s nights.” (lines 7-8). ‘Mass’ alludes to ‘common people’, the populace, and coupled with the adjective ‘monstrous’ might borrow from John Dryden’s “Absalom and Achitopel”: “A monstrous mass of foul corrupted matter.” (Part II, line 464). Significantly, Dryden’s poem treats poverty and richness in relation to a ‘Jew’ (“With wealth he was not trusted, for heaven knew/ What it was to pamper up a Jew.” (II, 470-1) And it describes an attack against God: “he curses God, but God before curst him.” (II, 467). The setting in Rosenberg’s poem is described as a place in which “God’s love is everywhere, but here is naught/ Save love His anger slew.” (lines 19-20). The comparison between the ‘real’ slaughtered love and the ‘ideal’ revived love entails an act of blaming God whose mercy is absent. Consequently, the girl, whom the persona meets in the street, has abandoned belief in God: “my horror flamed/ At her forgot of God.” (lines 27-8).

But he is also astonished at the peculiar nature of the girl’s eyes:

Her hungered eyes,
Craving and yet so sadly spiritual,
Shone like the unsmirched corner of a jewel
Where else foul blemish lies.

(lines 29-32)

⁷² Ibid., p. 34.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 35; see also Davis Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994), p. 172; for more see pp. 172-84.

Spirituality is accompanied by sadness, an idea perhaps recalled from Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes": "And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear" (line 310). But the phrase 'sadly spiritual' is ambiguous and means either that her melancholy exists precisely because of her spirituality, or despite it. The duality of sadness and spirituality is compared to the jewel that shines at one side and hides 'corruption' at the other. The girl is then revealed to be a working-class member, poor and about to be homeless:

She told me how
The shadow of black death had newly come
And touched her father, mother, even now
Grim-hovering in her home,

Where fevered lay
Her wasting brother in a cold bleak room,
Which theirs would be no longer than a day,
And then - the streets and doom.

(lines 37-44)

This echoes Blake's "London" with its persona walking in the streets, the 'harlot' and 'plague'. This polarity between sadness and spirituality generates an ambiguous kind of love, "Love's strange clime," combining purity and desire, spirituality and physicality; "desire awoke" and "Through purified desires." Love is under the danger of 'sin', "for we had wondered into Love's strange clime/ Through ways sin awaits to slay." Again, the sense of 'slay' relates to the earlier image of God's love "his anger slew". Hence the persona and the girl are wandering into the realms of love and sexuality, desire and sin, sadness and happiness and above all, reality and appearance as designated into the image of the jewel with its exterior shining and interior 'blemish'.

At her early appearance in the poem, the girl is introduced as "peer[ing] 'neath lids shamed"; here shame suggests a socially rejected act, a misdeed. Nevertheless, she remains like the jewel, altogether clean and corrupted, valuable and valueless, suggesting that she is both rather than either. In other words, the persona's attitude towards her is still antithetical and undecided yet. She is associated with a "body's dole", relating sorrow to the body. This suggests prostitution; the girl being a prostitute who sacrifices her body to make a living and

help a dying brother. In this way the poem seems to be an investigation of prostitution in terms of the dialectic of the means and the end, the question being whether prostitution is the right means for making a living and helping a sick brother. Furthermore, 'body's dole' might also be a symbol for the working class whose life is contingent upon physical labour. The persona's meeting with the girl here reminds of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, when the hero first meets Mirah, the Jewess:

then to smile at his own share in the prejudice that interesting faces must have interesting adventures; then to justify himself for feeling that sorrow was the more tragic when it befell delicate, childlike beauty. 'I should not have forgotten the look of misery if she had been ugly and vulgar,' he said to himself...

'Great God', the words escaped Deronda in a tone so low and solemn that they seemed like a prayer become unconsciously vocal. The agitating impression this forsaken girl was making on him stirred a fibre that lay close to his deepest interest in the fates of women - 'perhaps my mother was like this one'.⁷⁴

Deronda later finds out that his mother *was* just like Mirah. He becomes interested not only in the fates of women, but also in the fates of Jewish women, especially when he himself discovers later that he was a Jew; hence his perceptions change in relation to his new racial identity, and he overcomes earlier 'prejudice'. Rather than attacking the consequent social corruption, Rosenberg's poem contains polarities that require an understanding of and attack against the causes of these conditions of the working class, an understanding that the result of the poet's first hand experience of such conditions in the East End.

The last stanza encompasses an implicit attack against God:

God's mercy shines.
And my full heart hath made record of this.
Of grief that burst from out its dark confines
Into strange sunlit bliss.

(lines 69-72)

The poet's vocation and his recording of the girl's grief were invoked by God's mercy without which this record would not have been materialised. But the record

documents God's lack of mercy. The girl prostitutes herself for a noble cause; God's mercy sheds light on His cruelty; the poet acknowledges this mercy as having enabled him to reveal the truth; three different manifestations of the duality of the jewel. In the case of the poet and the girl the means justifies the end. In the case of God it does not; the means, His mercy, is negated by its consequence. The poet might be excused for manipulating God's mercy to show His cruelty; the girl her body for survival, but God cannot be excused of cruelty for being angry at the peoples' sins: "A steaming wail at doom the Lord had scrawled/ For perilous loads of sins." It is His cruelty which makes the crushed classes sin. Prostitution, physical and spiritual destruction, unemployment, housing crises, sickness, death of youth, poverty, want and need as characteristics of this place push the poem back in the direction of the working class and to the conditions of the East End. However, the idea of purity, the issue of 'monstrous mass' the idea of shame, the image of the jewel and 'body's dole' are all elements of the poem's deeper working-class theme which goes beyond a mere report of the social scene.

Before these deeper meanings are revealed, it is worth tracing similar allusions in "Dawn Behind Night":

Lips! bold, frenzied utterance, shape to the thoughts that are prompted by hate
Of the red streaming burden of wrong we have borne and still bear;
That wealth with its soul-crushing scourges placed into its hands by fate,
Hath made the cement of its towers, grim-girdled by our despair.

(lines 1-4)

This seems a symbolic representation of the conditions of the working class. The magnificent blood-image in "red streaming" uncovers an awareness of the harsh physical experience the working class suffer; so harsh that it is called a 'burden'. The continuous sense of 'streaming' paves the way for the assertion that this is a burden which "we have borne and still bear" where 'still bear' generates further emphasis for the present perfect tense. This shows that such a burden is not 'new' but is rather a phenomenon that is rooted in past history. The reference to 'wealth' in the third line highlights the suggested notion of a working-class sensibility as it alludes to the rentier classes and to a world of materialistic values. Such classes and

⁷⁴ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1878), repr. 1896, pp. 139-41.

values are “scourges” which destroy the soul. In this way wealth appears destructive both physically and spiritually. The association between ‘scourges’ and ‘fate’ recurs in other poems as in “Love to Be” where the image “Scourge of partial fate” becomes a basis for attacking God for allowing such unjust life of inequality to dominate.

Clearer allusions to upper classes are evident in the connotations of ‘towers’ in the last line. Alternatively, there is the possibility that it alludes to industrial civilisation in relation to what will appear later as part of Rosenberg’s attack against industrialism in symbolising modern city life in the image of ‘mindless, spiritless, and blind monstrous buildings’. Hence, such symbolic ‘inhuman’ buildings are presented as “grim-girdled by our despair”. “Girdled” suggests a possible connection with the “girdle” in Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (line 23). In Arnold’s poem the idea of “human misery” (line 18) validates the connection in that it fits the theme in Rosenberg’s poem. Although Arnold’s persona asks for his beloved’s love, the idea of “true” love is what Rosenberg’s persona lacks in modern cities. Moreover, the distinction between false, disguised pleasant appearances and hidden sorrow and depression in civilised cities is also central in “Dover Beach”, having a similar comment on civilisation, like the one Rosenberg makes:

...for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
No certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

(Lines 29-33)

Rosenberg’s poem too is centred around such polarities. First, a juxtaposition exists between the poem’s dreadful image of industrial society and the idealised perception of it which, though not explicitly rendered, occurs in terms of negative presence and related connotations. Second, there is a juxtaposition between the life of the working class and that of the wealthy, with the poet identifying himself with the former through the dominant sense of ‘we’ and ‘us’, as he distances himself from the latter by means of the demonstrative ‘that’ and the pronouns ‘they’, ‘their’ and ‘them’.

The second stanza enriches such allusions; the danger of wealth is presented now as “the death that they make”, and lack of sentimentality is reflected in “the silence that follows the sob”. It turns out that the poem builds up an image of profit-bound life in which the ‘other’, the materialistic and wealthy, is careless about “our grief” which is the consequence of the “bleakness assigned us for the fruits that we reap and they rob”; the alliteration strengthens the association between ‘reap’ and ‘rob’. Certainly, the title reflects an optimistic mood, but, in contradiction, it also suggests an opposite sense of pessimism, for it indicates monotony. Relatedly, in “A Ballad of Time, Life And Memory” a similar indication of monotony is clearer: “From dawn through day to dawn.” Consequently, the emphasis on a maintained “glimpse of a heaven behind it”, is accompanied by a hidden sign of pessimism essenced to the passive sense in “will find us, free us and take us”.

The attack against materialism within the previous poems shows how money is a means for escaping the sordid reality, being a source of power. Implicit references to jewellery are dominant, in relation to the image of the jewel. But jewellery and materialism are associated with the ‘other’. The other is perhaps the Gentile upper class as opposed to the particularly Jewish working class, as in the reference to the ‘bone-and-rag’ Jewish trade, and in Dryden’s ‘to pamper up a Jew’. This reminds of the prototypical literary image of the Jew, Shylock, as portrayed in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. The association with stones and jewellery - and jewel can be a pun on ‘Jew’ – as an indication of materialism, becomes an attribute of civilisation rather than the Jew. This brings back Rosenberg’s previous idea of philistinism in *On A Door Knocker* where he comments on the materialistic society, and the age in which poetry has become class-bound and where the poet is forced to become philistine while the philistine becomes the poet. This suggests the corruption of the upper classes of Western society rather than the Jew. Again, the previous allusion, in *Moses*, to upper classes, perhaps bourgeois society, exploiting the working class for their own benefit, renders a sense of ‘high mindedness’. In “Dawn Behind Night” the Jewish working class is exploited to serve Gentile society, a service the Jew not permitted to have.

In the golden glare of the morning, in the solemn serene of the night,
We look on each other’s faces, and we turn to our prison bar;

(lines 9-10)

Working all day, they return to their prisons, which in addition to the previous cage-and-gate images, perhaps symbolise the 'ghetto'. (See Chapter One)

Consequently, the poem rejects the traditional association of materialism to Jews and rather shows that it is a characteristic of Western bourgeois society. In this sense the poet poses as one interested in uncovering realities hidden by false disguised appearances. The title "Dawn Behind Night", in addition to the previous sense of optimism and monotony, can be a suggestion of an act of lightening the dark and removing the darkness that hides realities; this becomes an act of 'calling a spade a spade': "things that are." (Line: 8) The same sense is presented in "A Ballad of Whitechapel" where the poet "make[s] record" of "grief that burst out from its dark confines," bringing it "Into strange sunlit bliss." He also sheds "light/ Above the monstrous mass," as opposed to the darkness of "London's nights." On the other hand, an act of hiding truth is attributed to the society. In "Dawn Behind Night", the association with 'store' reflects an implicit sense of coverage and hiding; it is even associated with 'pride' and hence links with the Gentile 'other', with an implicit reflection on Christianity. Opposed to this is the realm of freedom which the poet implies in the shore at which the ship will port; this will be a place that is "opened wide", where there will be no proud and high-minded hiding but rather infinite openness.

Hence, beyond the superficial or even implicit references to poverty, corruption and prostitution there lies a deeper criticism of western 'civilised' bourgeois society. Materialistic society is revealed as the destroyer rather than the victim of the 'monstrous mass'. Modern society and the industrial city are civilised masks. In "Fleet Street", Rosenberg volunteers to report to the world the reality of the modern city; one that goes behind the lines of the mass circulation newspapers produced there:

From north and south, from east and west,
Here in one shrieking vortex meet
These streams of life, made manifest
Along the shaking quivering street.
Its pulse and heart that throbs and glows
As if strife were its repose.

I shut my ear to such rude sounds
 As reach a harsh discordant note,
 Till, melting into what surrounds,
 My soul doth with the current float,
 And from the turmoil and the strife
 Wakes all the melody of life.

(lines 1-12)

The title of Rosenberg's poem recalls John Davidson's "Fleet Street Eclogues", where the word 'vortex' features: "The vortex of a whirling ocean," (line 67). Davidson also uses the word in "A Woman and Her Son" (line 75). Francis Thompson, a favourite poet for Rosenberg, uses the word in "From the Night of Forebeing: An Ode After Easter": "As is the golden vortex in the West" (line 281). However the word features widely in Blake's poetry; he uses it six times in his long poem "Milton (lines 22, 23, 29, 34, 35 and 41); he also uses it in "Jerusalem" (Plate 48, line 54), and in "Vala" (Night the First, line 117; Night the Second, line 384). In Rosenberg's poem, the report he presents is laconic:

The stony buildings blindly stare
 Unconscious of the crime within,
 While man returns his fellow's glare
 The secrets of his soul to win.
 And each man passes from his place,
 None heed. A shadow leaves such trace.

(lines 13-8)

'Stony' links with the previous materialistic sense of 'stones' and 'jewels'. 'Unconscious and 'blindly' emphasise the absence of human values in this society. Again, this is paraphrased in Rosenberg's description of "this pettifogging, mercantile, money-loving age" as "deaf, dead as their dead idol gold, and dead as that to all higher ennobling influences." (*CW*, 190). Important here is the idea of 'passing' which alludes to the barriers that separate the Jew from Western society and to the Jews' need to pass the margins of their status whether as a race or a class, as will be detailed later. An earlier draft of the poem refers to crime, materialism and prostitution, with more emphasis on the 'inner':

The stony buildings blankly stare
 While murder's being done within
 While man returns his fellow's glare
 The secrets of his soul to miss.

And each man's heart is foul with lust
Of women, or the blind gold dust.

Tallett noticed that while the city is presented to be full of life as it 'shrieks', 'shakes' and 'quivers', it is also "like a machine as it 'throbs' and 'glows';" this is an indication that the city is devoid of soul, for "even death passes unnoticed in "Fleet Street", which is implied in: "And each man passes from his place,/ None heed. A shadow leaves such trace."⁷⁵ Tallett concluded that this was meant to show that man had become "a cog in a machine" in a modern life that suffers "a lack of humanity"⁷⁶ It becomes clear that Rosenberg's attack against modern society is based on attributing to it blindness and spiritlessness, an act which resembles his attack against God as being a blind and spiritless shrieking intellectual. Tallett asserted that Rosenberg was here rebelling against the idea of Mammon which he later abandoned for a new attack against God.⁷⁷ But these two enemies remained indivisible in Rosenberg's mind, as different versions of 'blind submission'; hence the attack against the materialistic industrial society is always associated with an unjust 'partial fate' imposed by an unjust and cruel God, an attitude which occurs in, for example, "Dawn Behind Night". A similar attitude where blame of God and civilised society is brought altogether appears in a letter describing his feelings after becoming unemployed:

You are the victim of a horrible conspiracy; everything is unfair. The gods have either forgotten you or made you sort of a scapegoat to bear all the punishment. (*CW*, 181)

Here the working class Jew, Rosenberg himself, becomes a victim rather than a victimiser in the Western society. He is a victim of 'conspiracy', or, as previously shown, of 'pride'; hence, he becomes a scapegoat. However, 'conspiracy', pride, shame, religion, purity, interiority and 'body's dole' become basic concepts in which Rosenberg's defence of the working-class Jew can be figured. These represent the dictates of the Western society against which he rebelled, as in announcing that "I shut my ear to such rude sounds." ("Fleet Street"). Within these ideas Rosenberg's

⁷⁵ Tallett, p. 55.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

thought has some parallels with major “secular Jewish intellectuals”, as they are called, such as Freud and Karl Marx, whose lifework, it is argued, is rooted into the social conditions of the Jews and Western society during the so-called ‘emancipation’.⁷⁸

Some of these parallels are central in the previously discussed works. In “A Ballad of Whitechapel” Rosenberg alludes to the place of the common individual in the civilised society, which is hostile to the working class, considered a ‘monstrous mass’. This degradation of the common citizen appears within a society associated with wealth and materialism. Hence the poem revises the notion of ‘Love’ as a human value in such a context. The persona’s love towards the girl is associated with desire and physicality: “Desire awoke”. At the beginning, the persona is conservative about the girl’s status as prostitute, her activities being socially and religiously misdemeanours; thus, he is surprised at her being “forgot of God.” Social and religious values are engrossed within constant reference to ‘sin’ and ‘shame’, but after she tells him about her conditions, the persona understands her situation, feels intimate towards her, and turns to question God as being responsible for forcing her to get involved in this ‘body’s dole’. He becomes sceptical about religion; his belief is now “anguish-smitten by sharp sword.” In addition, he no longer believes in the civilised idea of love as being spiritual refinement of physicality, for he finds in the girl a real spiritual cleanliness:

I walked with her
Because my heart thought, ‘Here the soul is clean,
The fragrance of the frankincense and myrrh
Is lost in odours mean.’

(lines 33-6)

The idea of reality opposed to appearance surfaces again, as in the last two lines. While it seems that the prostitute has mean odours and neutralises the ‘myrrh’ of the spirit, it can be also understood that ‘fragrance and frankincense’ are false civilised values, and disguised scented appearances. In *Moses* Rosenberg consolidates this perception of perfumes, in line with an attack against Providence:

⁷⁸ John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity*, 2nd ed. (1987) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 4; 120.

As ladies' perfumes are
 Obnoxious to stern natures,
 This miasma of a rotting god
 Is to me.

(lines: 142-5)

This is accompanied by a related perception of civilisation as a destruction of the innocence of nature:

Who has made of the forest a park?
 Who has changed the wolf to a dog?
 And put the horse in harness?
 And man's mind in a groove?

(lines: 146-9)

Fragrance is a civilised means of 'refinement'. In civilised perceptions, desire is inferiorised, an act Rosenberg rejects. He announces that civilised refinements of love are parts of the cultivation of Nature, "metamorphosis". (*Moses*, line: 151).

He replaces civilised corrupted perception of desire by his "love's new fires" by which he achieves "purified desires" that are free from the social and religious constraints. Unlike civilised "Love's euphony", his 'new love' plays "music wild deliciously". Rosenberg is not convinced of the sublimated ideal view of love which appears for him "Love – Love – O! tremulous name." Being a name, it seems a creation of civilised euphemistic language, to pass the constraints of sin, pride and purity. Rosenberg revolts against civilisation, for which the jewel becomes a symbol, representing a materialistic society. He draws attention to realities "beneath" appearances. Hence, the jewel shines at one side while hiding "foul blemish" elsewhere. Desire is not absent from civilised love but it is simply hidden because of ideas of 'sin'. Conversely, in "Creation", Rosenberg wonders "what foolish lips first framed 'I sin'." 'Body's dole' becomes, accordingly, a parody for civilised pressures on physicality. These pressures are the results of spiritualisation processes which hence make the girl 'sadly spiritual'; that is, sad because of extreme spirituality. Spiritualisation is rooted in the Christian perception of the body, as will be further detailed later. Rosenberg refers to God's mercy being slew by his anger, alluding to this aspect. He is analysing the conditions of the Whitechapel, after which he is sceptical at the whiteness of the chapel.

Similar ideas surface in “Dawn Behind Night” and “Fleet Street”, where the speaker in each poem questions ‘pride’ and looks ‘within’. In “Fleet Street”, modern society is portrayed as being devoid of human love where “each man passes from his place/ None heed”, so that no collective humane love between the individuals is there; instead, the image is of greedy, selfish egocentric individuals. The society that claims adopting refined human values appears in reality to have not. Thus, in “Dawn Behind Night”, he announces that “To pour out the strong wine of pity, outstretch the kind hand in relief.” (Line 8). This meant for Tallett an awareness of the horrors of drinking in working-class contexts suggesting that ‘strong wine of pity’ means a “deadly dose”.⁷⁹ However, this reading is shallow. Certainly, heavy drinking was a dominant conduct in working-class settings and a working-class sensibility would not ignore such a major issue. However, the reference to wine in Rosenberg’s poem does not suggest drinking; it is rather a reaction against the civilised upper class of the society who pretends to care for the working class. This care is governed by rules insisting that the ‘inferior’ low individual should get refined before he wins the license of civility and becomes assimilated. This alludes to the conditions of the East End of London at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Salvation Army controlled charities in the East End, and it is even asserted that the social reformers were “engaged in treating the symptoms not the disease. All rejected political act, nor could they contemplate a radical transformation of society in secular terms.”⁸⁰ Rosenberg is asking for freedom from the censorship of the sublimated views of the western society on ‘low’ individuals’ behaviour. It is not through pity but rather through a ‘strong wine of pity’ that the individual is freed from the rules of civility, where wine neutralises the censorship of the superego, the rules of civilisation, shame, guilt and embarrassment. This can be achieved only by releasing the ‘kind hand’, the metaphor for the power of industrial ‘civilised’ society. Laws and rules strengthen the barriers and narrow the margins of class, and race. Thus, in “Fleet Street”, Rosenberg associates the ‘other’ with ‘passing’, an important word for Jews. The word is dominant in Rosenberg’s poetry as it recurs in, for example, “We Are Sad With a Vague Sweet Sorrow” and “Peace”.

⁷⁹ Tallett, p. 57.

Freudianism and Marxism are examples of the need to 'pass' over the Gentile barriers placed around the Jew.⁸¹ John Murray Cuddihy argued that Freud's (and Marx's) work "was to make sense of the Jewish emancipation," for Freud codified the problem of Jewish social intercourse with the Gentiles in terms of "sexual intercourse."⁸² His need to "pass" the constraints of Western society finds its way in the attempt to unmask the unrespectability of "bourgeois civil society" which, in Freud's words, is "founded on the suppression of instincts."⁸³ For both Freud and Marx ideas of modernisation and civility meant "refinement".⁸⁴ 'Emancipation', likewise, meant for both of them 'refining', 'sublimating' and 'civilising' European Jewry, against which they reacted. In his "The Jewish Question", Marx takes the philistine Jewish economic behaviour, which he criticises, to be a sign of a corrupted bourgeois society, rather than a Jewish propensity.⁸⁵ And in his 'sexual speculations', Freud, as Max Weber argued, reacted against the "erotic sublimation of sexuality" he saw in the European society.⁸⁶

These revisions of Western civilisation are rooted in religious differences. In "The Jewish Question" Marx rejected any association between the "Sabbath Jew" and philistinism; he did not defend the attitude but accepted it as an attribute of the

⁸⁰ Fishman, p. 67; for more see pp. 50-68.

⁸¹ Researchers have argued the indivisible relation between Marxism and Freudianism at one hand and the Jewish origins of Freud and Marx on the other, particularly in the context of the nineteenth century ideas of Jewish 'emancipation'. See Cuddihy; Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truth: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989); Jacques Barzun, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner: Critique of a Heritage* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1942); William McGrath, "How Jewish Was Freud," in *The New York Review of Books*, December 5, 1991, pp. 27-31; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991); Reuben Osborn, *Freud and Marx: A Dialectical Study* (London: Gollancz, 1937).

⁸² Cuddihy, p. 11.

⁸³ Ibid., pp.38-40; Freud's words originally from Sigmund Freud, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality," in *Collected Papers*, vol. 2, *Clinical Papers and Papers on Technique*, trans. Joan Reviere (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 308.

⁸⁴ Cuddihy, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddart, eds. and trans., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1967), pp 242; 245; 247.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Cuddihy, p. 65; originally from Max Weber, "Judaism, Christianity, and the Socio-Economic Order," in *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 257.

ordinary, westernised Jew, who, rather than being influenced by his Jewish religion, was forced to adopt such an attitude under the pressures of the bourgeois values he was placed within.⁸⁷ Weber uncovered a related religious sense in Freud to whom the Christian sublimated perception of desire and sexuality meant a “disguise of coarse ‘nature’ underneath.”⁸⁸ In light of this idea of refinement and sublimation or civility, Freud said: “The genitals themselves have not undergone the development of the rest of the human form in the direction of beauty; they have retained their animal cast.”⁸⁹ The assimilation of Jews meant for Freud a projection of the “untransformed” sexual instinct of the Western Christian society; the Jew, like the ‘Id’ and Eros, is considered vulgar and hence is not permitted to ‘pass’ Gentile constraints, the superego, before either becomes assimilated; hence for Freud and Marx accepting the assimilation meant self-degradation.⁹⁰

The question of Jewish sexual ethics was discussed in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, it is necessary here to see how Rosenberg’s previous conservative perception of love in “A Ballad of Whitechapel” stems from his Jewish heritage. Gordis has investigated the difference between Judaic and Christian perceptions of sexuality, arguing that, unlike Christianity, in Judaism sexuality is not inferior; for while in Christianity celibacy is the ideal state of man, in Judaism marriage is the perfect state of man and it is mandatory for a man and his wife to derive pleasure from sexual intercourse.⁹¹ The Jewish attitude towards sexuality equates love and lust and the ethical aspect comes in singling marriage as the proper frame or vehicle for sex. Herbert Marcuse considered Freud’s idea of sublimation as a sense of repression, in that sexuality is repressed through acts of sublimation.⁹² Leslie Fiedler considered “psychoanalysis... [a] defence of sexual emancipation.”⁹³ Rosenberg’s

⁸⁷ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” pp. 243-7.

⁸⁸ Cuddihy, p. 65.

⁸⁹ Freud, *Collected Papers, Papers on Metapsychology, Papers on Applied Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Joan Riviere (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 257.

⁹⁰ Cuddihy, pp. 64-5.

⁹¹ Robert Gordis, *Love and Sex: A Modern Jewish Perspective* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988), pp. 45ff; 85; 98-100; 105-6.

⁹² Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 69.

attitude towards love outlined earlier in “A Ballad of Whitechapel” parallels these perceptions. Not only does he reject the term ‘sin’ in describing lust but he also equates love and lust: “We will call for love in vain,/ Finding that love was lust.” (“Love and Lust”).

While Freud and Marx sensed the problem of the Jew to be social interaction, “social behaviour in public,” for being considered a vulgar community, their works adopt scientific approaches to investigate the matter especially after realising the religious discontinuity as a major aspect of the Jewish problem.⁹⁴ Marx considered the vulgar economic attitude of the Jews a sign of bourgeois economic systems; Freud considers vulgar Jewish social behaviour - which for the Gentiles is improper – psychologically normal while civility itself, and its appropriation of behaviour, are psychological sicknesses.⁹⁵ Jewishness influenced Rosenberg’s treatment of the working-class theme in a relatively similar way as it influenced Freud and Marx, as can be seen in *Moses* and *Rudolph*.

In *Moses*, the Pharaoh’s edict to Moses symbolises the ‘licence’ for ‘passing’ the barriers of civility. Pharaoh is an agent of the civilisation which builds great pyramids, significantly, described as “barriers”, (line: 5). The edict uncovers how the upper class viewed the working class as “idiots for tools,” (line: 6). Tellingly, in Rosenberg’s earlier description of the play (the idea of eduntualism) as well as here, ‘high-mindedness’ of the upper class is evident. It is reflected in a barbaric greedy attitude toward the working slaves. Not only does the wealthy steal the molars of common man, but they also:

The satraps swore
Their wives’ bones hurt them when they lay abed
That before were soft and plump. The people howled
They’d boil the slaves three days to get their fat,
Ending the famine. A haggard council held
Decrees the two hind molars, those two staunchest
Busy labourers in the belly’s service, to be drawn

⁹³ Leslie Fiedler, “Zion as Eros,” in *The Jew in the American Novel*, Herzl Institute Pamphlet no. 10 (New York, 1959), p. 20.

⁹⁴ Cuddihy, pp. 8; 228.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

From out each slave's greased mouth, which soon,
 From incapacity, would lose the habit
 Of eating.

(Lines: 14-23)

This is exactly the idea of the working class being exploited by the upper class in "Dawn Behind Night". Civility is shown to be a disguised barbarism; bourgeois selfishness is opposed to their prototypical view of the slaves as selfish because of their massive consumption. If the slaves have an economically embarrassing attitude, the upper class's behaviour is no less embarrassing; it is simply disguised, sublimated, just as Pharaoh is "well peruked and oiled." (Line 44). Revealing these 'crude' observations, Moses announces that he has given up the rules of the civilised society: "I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor." (Line 51). He gives up appearances and cares for realities and essences: "showed to my dull outer eyes/ The living eyes underneath." (Lines: 60-1). The same as the previous act of bringing reality into "strange sunlit bless", he is now "too much awake." (Line: 89).

Sexual ethics are also present in *Moses*. Abinoah, whose 'obsession' is "hatred of the Jews," addresses the slaves as the "circumcised slaves." (Line: 327) He also promises that "I'll circumcise and make holy your tongues,/ And stop one outlet to your profanation." (Lines 331-2) There are religious and racial dimensions in the idea of 'circumcision'. Jewish Semites are circumcised and Christians Gentiles are not. Implicit also is the Gentile perception of the Jewish 'vulgar' social behaviour. This emphasis on vulgarity is the essence of civilised intentions to sublimate the Jews. On the other hand, Abinoah is portrayed as 'corrupted'; he takes hashish (line: 327) and, in Moses's words, is a "drunken rascal." (Line: 376). Within the character of Abinoah, Rosenberg dramatises the Gentile inferior perceptions of the working class, presented to be exclusively Jews. These perceptions are reflected in Abinoah's anti-Semitic descriptions of the Jews: "But mud and lice and Jews are very busy/ Breeding plagues in ease." (lines: 373-4). Moses revolts against Gentile sublimation, announcing that "more than prince, I'm man" (line: 394). He overcomes the high-minded Gentile thought having "a trouble in my mind for largeness" (line: 447), where 'largeness' perhaps symbolises the act of breaking the sceptres that controlled his thought. This becomes clear when Moses explains this largeness:

Here are the springs, primeval elements,
The roots' hid secrecy, old source of race,
Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct.

(Lines: 450-2)

Unlike the narrow-minded sublimated Western thought, 'largeness' of thought means an awareness of instinct. This comprehensive thought is the awareness of the inside and the outside, the body and the spirit: "solidity as human life can be" (line: 465).

In *Rudolph*, Rosenberg allegorises the struggle of the working-class artist to 'pass' the barriers of bourgeois society. He is aware that the licence for such a passage lies in accepting the 'refined' values of the controlling upper class; Rudolph is described as an artist "whose desire to refine and elevate mankind" meant "a reciprocal desire to elevate himself." (*CW*, 276). However, he lives in a spiritual conflict between his need to 'pass' and his awareness of "the wasted life and youth... the helplessness of the barren now." (*CW*, 276). While in the National Gallery, he meets a lady who is revealed to be a bourgeois and who tells him: "I am painting the interior and you just happen to fit in well." (*CW*, 277). Rudolph's internal feeling which the narrator reveals seems a comment on bourgeois attitudes towards art: "to whom art was a necessity as in the ingredients that go to make up culture." (*CW*, 277). The words 'ingredients', 'make up' and 'culture' allude to the superficiality of the bourgeois mind. That Rudolph symbolised for the lady the interior is perhaps a suggestion that the common individual is the 'id' or the alter-ego of the bourgeois. Rudolph rejects this superficiality and argues that a painting should reveal "what we cannot see" (*CW*, 277) and he asserts that "the greatest artist... makes the common place so delightfully precious." (*CW*, 277). This is Rudolph's attitude towards art, being an artist "unfortunately", for he cannot "exchange it for a pair of shoe laces if I wanted to." (*CW*, 277-8). Artistic creativity is at risk "when one has to think of responsibilities, when one has to think strenuously how to manage to subsist." (*CW*, 278) These complaints win Rudolph the sympathy of the lady. However, the way she responds to him marks high-minded mentality: "as I cannot let a sinner so young go on sinning." (*CW*, 278). She invites him to meet her nephew, Leonard Harris. This invitation is the beginning of the process of 'passing' and becoming refined. It might be a reflection on Rosenberg's own struggle to 'pass' the margins of his race and class because the

story of Rudolph which describes a “poverty stricken artist invited to a society dinner,” Liddiard argued, is an allusion to Rosenberg’s own meeting with Mrs Delissa Joseph.⁹⁶ Here Rosenberg represents the social context of the East End as described by M. Brotz:

People in the East End are touchy about living there when they meet people from wealthier districts. Where they do not (or cannot) conceal the fact, they adopt an apologetic and defensive attitude about it. They are anxious to assert that they can actually afford to move to a better neighbourhood but are prevented from doing so by some factor beyond their control at the present... ‘...because of the business,’ or ‘because of my parents’.⁹⁷

Rudolph’s eagerness to pass the margins of his class makes him accept Harris’s invitation, to discover later that he is not aware of the rules of ‘passing’ of which his friend Dave reminds him, the need to wear “Evening dress.” But Dave will help him by borrowing it from “my landlady, who... possesses a husband, who possesses an evening dress;” the financial associations essential terms in such a “-igh society”. (*CW*, 279). The dress symbolises the superficiality of ‘high’ mentality. In the dress, Rudolph feels “enveloped” and:

Transformed, transfigured; and in his sense of power he mentally pictured society as a beautiful lady, deferential and smiling, showering flowers and delights. (*CW*, 279).

However, “shyness” and “embarrassment” also accompany these feelings. (*CW*, 279). These are necessary obligations for him if he is to ‘pass’; they are also obligations for his art if it is to ‘pass’: “you take more trouble in defending your pictures than in painting them.” (*CW*, 280). The working-class artist needs help in order to achieve recognition: “propaganda is a necessary evil” (*CW*, 280), when the upper class controls recognition

Suppression - refinement in the civilised sense - is reflected in Rudolph’s jokes. Here the significance of jokes can be seen in the light of Freud’s writings.

⁹⁶ Liddiard, p. 37; 68.

⁹⁷ Howard M. Brotz, “The Outlines of Jewish Society in London”, in Freedman (ed.), pp. 143-44

Cuddihy argued that Freud was fascinated with jokes as part of the “phenomenon of ‘unsuitable effects,’ its expression and repression, and of how it ‘passes’ or fails to ‘pass’ the censor” which Cuddihy related to the Jewish need, during the assimilation era, to achieve admission to civil society.⁹⁸ In other words, Freud considers jokes psychological examples of social repression.⁹⁹ As for Rudolph, when asked whether there are other artistic talents in his family, he answers:

The only deviation into artistic endeavour I have ever seen my father makes was when he, in a frenzy of inspiration, turned and decorated my left eye most beautifully in blue and black... and he accompanied that extraordinary feat with a fervour of exuberant flowery language.” (CW, 280)

This seems an act of self-criticism; that is, of the working class, like the attitude with the patrons outlined earlier in the letters where he says that he does not mind if the patron would call him ‘rude’, ‘ungentlemanly’ and ‘ungrateful’. (CW, 195). In other words, this alludes to the working-class acceptance of bourgeois superiority by stating their own inferiority, which was one way of achieving the help of a patron, as mentioned earlier. Hence, the language here is highly sublimated and refined; furthermore, the terms by which Rudolph criticises his class echo those civilised ‘euphemistic’ terms of the upper class. Such terms as ‘scandal’, ‘shame’, ‘immoral’ and ‘superiority’ are further echoes of the high minded views against common people:

I am the first to scandalise the family with a difference. They consider it immoral to talk and think unlike them – and – well what can I do – they show their sense of superiority by being ashamed of me! (CW, 280).

⁹⁸ Cuddihy, p. 19; 20.

⁹⁹ The eighth volume of the standard edition of the complete psychoanalytic works of Freud treats the matter. (Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), vol. 8). Freud says that “jokes are used as an envelope for thoughts of the greatest substance”. (p. 92). In the case of authors, such as the comments on Goethe, Freud says that “joking and jesting ideas concealed problems; it would have been more correct to say that they touch on the solution of problems.” (p. 93). Freud relates the ‘comic’ to the ‘aesthetic’, relating the ‘pleasurable’ effect of jokes to its ‘intellectual content’. (pp. 95-6). The intellectual comes camouflaged in the comic when the society demands the former’s suppression: “only when we rise to a society of a more refined education do formal conditions of jokes play a part.” (p. 100). And

Here Rosenberg is playing with words, alluding to the high-minded mentality of the upper class whose practised superiority was held in a similar perception of the working class.

Another implicit criticism comes in the comic implications of the allusion to *Romeo and Juliet*; he reports that he wanted to do a sketch of the play and how he took his father for Romeo and the servant girl for Juliet:

When it was finished my mother came across it and of course thought I had sketched my father kissing the servant girl as I had seen it... the consequence... was a practical demonstration of his abhorrence for realism - and preference for decoration. (*CW*, 280)

This is basically a reflection on bourgeois sublimation of natural behaviour. By accepting the civilised and sublimated criticisms, "I altered my style since" (*CW*, 280), Rudolph is forced rather than persuaded. This is also reflected in his answer to the question of whether he is a writer saying, "I must plead guilty" (*CW*, 281), where compulsory acceptance of the superiority of the upper class is implied. The narrator affirms this, showing how Rudolph's "superficiality" is the "consequence of super-self-consciousness, a desire not to frustrate expectation," (*CW*, 281), of course, of the upper class. This indicates that his humour results from 'suppression' or, in the narrator's words, of "wit" and "refined intellect" (*CW*, 281) which also indicate the pressures of bourgeois 'civility'.

Opposed to this superficiality is a deeper hatred of suppression: "to curse inwardly the artificialities of convention... [and] temporary disguise." (*CW*, 282). Rudolph, as an example of those who accept refinement, is punished. Soon the servant discovers that the dress Rudolph wears is his own. But Rudolph comically responds that the spots on the dress (by which the servant recognises that it is his) lack creative artistic insight, and as if himself a member of the upper class, tells the servant "I forgive you." (*CW*, 282). Subjected to embarrassment, Rudolph leaves, realising how his "past", the attempt to 'pass' in the light of the suppresser's rules,

Freud adds: "in jokes nonsense often replaces ridicule and criticisms in the thoughts lying behind the joke... the joke work is doing the same thing as the dream work." (p. 107).

was “a horrible waste of God’s faculties.” (CW, 283). This brings back the description of Rudolph at the beginning of the story where he is associated with “titanic wrestlings of genius against the exigencies of circumstances... a sensitive organism, touched to emotions at the subtlest changes on the face of nature.” (CW, 276). Here he is presented as having an intellectual understanding of life; an understanding that recognises the real and natural drives of social intercourse as it relates to the ‘here and now’: “the helplessness of the barren now.” (CW, 276). This parallels Marx who refused to accept the bourgeois social terms and instead engaged himself in an intellectual investigation of the sub-cultural basis of the social scene. Tellingly, Marx criticised Eugene Sue’s novel *The Mysteries of Paris*, the hero of which is called Rodolphe Gerolstein; and he even wrote the original name as Rudolph the same way Rosenberg writes it.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Rosenberg’s work is rooted in his working class background; however, more important is that his treatment of the working class was influenced by his racial identity. What remains is to see how the critics of the time responded to class and race and if that response had any bearing on Rosenberg’s recognition as a poet.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx and Frierich Engles, *Worke* (Berlin: Heransgegeben von Institute Fur Marximus Bein Zk der SED, 1956-68), vol. II, p.221. Rosenberg’s descriptions of Rudolph (if Rudolph is to be considered a symbol for Marx) as one who has “titanic wrestlings of genius against the exigencies of circumstances” (CW, 276), might perhaps be argued as a reflection on Marx’s enthusiastic love for Prometheus, the titanic rebel, as evident in Marx’s PhD. thesis on Greek mythology (See S. S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 23; 28 65-6).

Chapter Five

The Social Mission: Marginalising Isaac Rosenberg

The Door Knocker

Take away all that the working class has given to English Literature and that literature would scarcely suffer; take away all that the educated class has given, and English Literature would scarcely exist.

Virginia Woolf¹

The emergence of a working-class literary tradition contributed to and played a role in shaping the nature of modern English literary criticism. This may sound a commonplace, but it is reflected in the fact that the most influential English critics tended to lay great emphasis on the social function of criticism; Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, the Leavises (F. R. and Q. D.) and others alike engaged in a 'social mission'. Arnold, for instance, associated the critic with a social mission for he considered him responsible for 'democracy', as claimed in his article on "Democracy"²; while in *Culture and Anarchy* he also championed the role of the critic and the poet in achieving social reformation by demanding "Equality", reacting against a 'misleading liberalism', and rejecting the idea of "Doing as One Likes". Such crusading was taken up by critics writing after him.³ Hence, Eliot's article, "The Social Function of Poetry", shows a preoccupation with a social mission on the part of the critic and the poet.⁴ In the case of the Leavises, a twin awareness of a cultural decline due to materialism and a concomitant levelling down in literary appreciation forms the basis for their calls for control over social literacy (as, for example, in Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*) and for their demands

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Leaning Tower*; Quoted in Carole Snee, "Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?" in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, eds. Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), p 71.

² Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960-77), (forthcoming references as *CPW*), vol. ii, pp. 3-30; other writings on 'Democracy' also feature in vol. V, pp. 43ff.

³ See Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 1983), p.28.

⁴ *Adelphi*, XXI (1945), pp. 152-165.

for the reform of university English teaching as, for example, in F. R. Leavis's *Education and the University: A Sketch for the 'English School'* (1943) and *English Literature in our Time and the University* (1969). A recent account of the *Scrutiny* movement asserts that "the name F. R. Leavis cannot be ignored in considering the relation of poetry to society"; he believed in the social function of literature, yet at the same time asserting that "only the discourse of literary criticism" can successfully undertake that mission of social reformation.⁵

The contribution of these critics is based on the realisation, initially by Arnold, that a cultural crisis had been caused by the influence of industrialism and materialism on the growth of a social class conflict; and the consequent inability of politics, religion and other social institutions to find a real solution. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold warned:

Faith in machinery is, I said, our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportionate to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery as if it had a value in and for itself.⁶

Though he saw the danger of industrial civilisation to be a factor which disintegrates society and widens, rather than closes, the gap between the British classes, he also blamed the indolence of the classes themselves. Rather than the traditional clichés of 'high', 'middle' and (working) 'low' class terminology, he exploited such terms as 'Barbarians', 'Philistines' and 'Populace', each of which is meant to reflect and criticise the nature of each class. He saw the disease in each class's struggle to achieve power for and on its own, and hence invited the whole society to abandon the competition for power:

I do not wish to see men of culture asking to be entrusted with power... in my opinion the speech most proper, at the present, for a man of culture to make to a body of his fellow-countrymen who get him into a committee-

⁵ See Gary Day, "Introduction: Poetry, Society and Tradition" in *British Poetry 1900-50: Aspects of Tradition*, ed. Gary Day and Brian Docherty (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), pp. 1-13; quotations are p. 1.

⁶ CPW, vol. v, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 96.

room, is Socrates's: *Know thyself!* and this is not a speech to be made by men wanting to be entrusted with power.⁷

A major aspect of such power is education, which, in Arnold's theory of 'culture', appears as a prominent source of a growing class conflict. He realised that the 'upper class' controlled education, simply because they had more educational opportunities. Hence, he asserted that a major cultural duty to be performed was to remove the unfair advantage:

the men of culture are the true apostles of equality... who have had a passion for... carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge... to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned...⁸

In other words, there was a need for a diversification of the exclusively upper-class English intelligentsia by including other classes, an act without which the disease would remain and anarchy become more than a likely consequence.

As a matter of fact, a whole cultural undercurrent reflected similar Arnoldian sentiments. Dover-Wilson referred to the "impending disaster signalled by working-class alienation from literary culture," and suggested that the working class "might put up with low wages and long hours in exchange for a purely educational equality."⁹ There was a danger of "a world-anarchy which threatens to bring the whole structure of civilisation toppling to the ground."¹⁰ George Sampson revealed a similar sentiment in his *English for the English*, warning against the threatening consequences of class-biased education:

What the teacher has to consider is not the minds he can measure but the souls he can save ...

⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁹ See Baldick, p. 99 and p. 100 (note no. 36); he reads and quotes J. Dover Wilson ed., *The Schools of England: A Study in Renaissance* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1928), pp. 25-6. See also Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse : A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 171.

¹⁰ J. Dover Wilson (ed.), Introduction to Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1932), repr. 1960, p. 28.

We have to undergo a conversion ...

The teacher's hardest struggle is not against pure ignorance but against evil knowledge.¹¹

But the aim of replacing a system of unfair distribution of education was accompanied by fear of a possible class bias on the part of those who, taking into account the other classes, would be responsible for providing equality. Hence, Arnold asked for 'disinterestedness'; 'cultural' critics should not be subject to the influence of political prejudice, as opposed to the dominant 'practical' criticism:

Everything was long seen, by the young and ardent amongst us, in inseparable connection with politics and practical life [...] Let us try a more disinterested mode of seeing them¹²

'Disinterestedness' aimed at avoiding class-biased criticism, seeking instead poetry and criticism that belong to the society at large. But this emerging 'liberalism' was not a regard for, but rather fear of, the lower classes. Arnold's discussion of Mr. Roebuck's definition of happiness reveals more:

This is the old story of our system of checks and every Englishman doing as he likes, which we have already seen to have been convenient enough so long as there were only the Barbarians and the Philistines to do what they liked, but to be getting inconvenient, and productive of anarchy, now that the Populace wants to do what it likes too.¹³

Raymond Williams argued that Arnold asserted the "deficiencies of the gospel of 'doing as one likes'," seeing "the danger of social anarchy as the rising class exerted power."¹⁴ Therefore, the call for the inclusion of the lower classes into the sphere of literacy sprang from fear of the negative influence of their sensibility on such literacy; to avoid evil knowledge, as seen earlier. That is, it was not by any means a response to the working-class social and literary sensibility; instead, it was a means of avoiding it.

¹¹ G. Sampson, *English for the English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), pp. 19; 33; 43.

¹² CPW, vol. III, *Lectures and Essays in Criticism* (1962), p. 282.

¹³ Arnold, *Culture And Anarchy*, in CPW, vol. v, pp. 156-157.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 118

Why was there such fear of the literary sensibility of the 'populace' when the upper class controlled publishing and education? The reason was the dominance of material values, where the major concern became profit-making, not literature; addressing the public's 'low' literary appreciation was a question of financial profit. This was the cause of the growth of a journalism which promoted works of literature in order to gain materially and, in addition, the appearance of works of literature which responded to such an ideal. As Joseph McAleer has asserted, between 1870 and 1914 two schools of thought, frequently intertwined, influenced the world of publishing, and, consequently, that of literacy: firstly, an optimistic school which attempted to "edify the newly literate masses" by replacing the material they read with religious leanings; and secondly, a school which was wholly "commercial and entrepreneurial", and which "seized the opportunities presented by the growing market for the greatest financial gain."¹⁵ Williams described this saying "the damage done by the stock nation of Wealth is its narrowing of human ideals to a single end, which is really only a means."¹⁶ Geoffrey Grigson alleged that twentieth century publishing policies were dominated by concern for financial gain, concluding hence that writing "is far too subjected to the dictates of the functionaries, and is far too little under the sovereignty of the writer."¹⁷ This became an age of publication when, Q. D. Leavis argued, "there was as yet no distinction between journalism and literature";¹⁸ in fact, it was a time when 'reading' frequently meant magazine reading, when weeklies were referred to as books, and when 'books' meant railway novels.¹⁹ Earlier T. H. S. Escott noticed: "for very many Englishmen of all classes, the periodical, daily, weekly or monthly, is synonymous with literature itself."²⁰

¹⁵ Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 12-3.

¹⁶ Williams, p. 106.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Grigson, *Blessings, Kicks and Curses: A Critical Collection* (London: Allison and Busby, 1982), p. 107.

¹⁸ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and The Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932) imp. by Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 85.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

F. R. Leavis stated that Arnold's 'anarchy' became a fact and, hence, his *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* came as a response to this.²¹ It was a situation where the necessary 'cultural' reformers were overpowered by a material-oriented mass. Baldick has alleged that the Leavises recognised that "the collapse of taste is not a result merely of the growing strength of the masses, but a tendency common to all classes."²² *Scrutiny* was even launched as a response to what appeared as a whole cultural undercurrent; that is to say, the diseased literary sensibility controlled the whole society, and Arnold's anarchy was becoming a fact.²³ The previous calls for educating the illiterate classes then came to be addressed with less of the earlier idealism; hence, the masses were seen as literate, and their literacy to have been influenced by the sensationalism and vulgarity of modern press.²⁴ The Leavises kept attacking "the supposed advantages of mass literacy," seeing that long working hours and high price of books as having caused cultural illiteracy "but this is something to be thankful for," when seeing the consequent cultural decline of mass literacy.²⁵

Like these critics, and in some cases before them, Rosenberg recorded his awareness of the undergoing cultural decline. He saw that the crisis was a consequence of industrialism when wealth became the only source of power, a catalyst, and the wealthy as the example to be imitated instead of the poet who hence lost his power as a moral agent and became alienated:

This is essentially an age of romance. We no longer dream but we live the dream. Romance is no more a dim world outside the ordinary world,

²⁰ T. H. S. Escott, *Social Transformations of The Victorian Age: A Survey of Court and Country* (London, 1897), p. 375.

²¹ F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Cambridge, 1930).

²² Baldick, p. 180.

²³ Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (London: Verso Editions, 1979), p. viii; he tries to account for the context which has influenced the appearance of *Scrutiny*, and the title of his book indicates so.

²⁴ See F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930), p. 104.

²⁵ In Baldick, p. 206; originally from *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 133.

whose inhabitants are only poets and lovers, but wide, tangible and universal. Poets no longer hold exclusive monopoly of the clouds, but whosoever pleases (except the poet generally) can soar aloft on the wings of an aeroplane beyond the reach and ken of man. No longer is it the poet who brags of the rushing chariot of the whirlwind, for he alone is unable to afford a motor. In fact, the positions are reversed. The philistine has become the romanticist, and the poet the philistine; and he actually presumes to deny the purity of their romanticism on the grounds that achieving the ideal destroys the ideal, and the charm of existence is the illusion of it. (*CW*, 274)

He suggests that the romance of the industrial world is false; that is, it is no longer imaginative and, by becoming real, has lost the desired consequences of the ideal associated with it, for its reality has disillusioned and frustrated those who imagined and dreamed of it as a utopian world. Consequently, Rosenberg tried to show why and how the spirit of the age denied poetry its power; how the traditionally original source of romance, the poet, is alienated and turned into a 'door knocker':

Few ever dream of considering - say - the romance of a door knocker ... We will take the knocker as it is, and study it in its aspect and relation to modern conditions ... We will see how the manners and customs, the tendencies of the age are reflected in the knocker. [*CW*, 274]

The problems of the age were aristocracy, and the decay of religion and faith:

A door knocker is the symbol of an unfinished civilization and an aloof and unassertive aristocracy. Its imperiousness is unquestioning, its meek acquiescence to convention a record of the sham of custom... It is a proof of the decay of religion, for it shows our want of faith in man, and consequently of the God in man. (*CW*, 274)

Loss of faith in God was replaced by faith in wealth, a new religion where appearance and materialistic power were elevated:

the ragged newsboy bartering news and information to the gentleman in the high hat. The gentleman in the high hat benevolently making a picture of himself for us to enjoy the spectacle; and see, this charming young lady decked out as a draper's front window, as if this were some merry carnival. (*CW*, 274)

In a letter to Mrs Wright, he explained: "but this pettifogging, mercantile, money-loving age is deaf, dead as their dead idol gold, and dead to all higher ennobling influences." (*CW*, 190) The word 'pettifogging', meaning legal trickery and the act of chicanery, reveals Rosenberg's criticism of his age in which immorality, cunning

and materialism have become legalised and socially approved manners. Such an age is likely to be labelled as 'deaf' and 'dead', as it sacrificed its moral values for the sake of financial wealth. A pettifogger is an attribute of a philistine; Rosenberg's choice of the word hence places him in the domain of Arnold's critique of materialistic culture.

Rosenberg realised that the industrial material world was reacted against by the romantics' but in the circumstances, their response to it proved to be a failure and, thus, the door knocker became the consequence:

The Chimney pot ... is the last stage, the final result of a series of causes that only minister to its service; whereas the knocker is the beginning - the cause of a certain result. (*CW*, 275)

The contrast between the 'chimney pot' and the 'knocker' suggests that the former is a symbol for the Romantics: "[B]efore the knocker all self-consciousness is abandoned and the natural and spontaneous is brought into play." (*CW*, 275) A similar sentiment towards the Romantics appears in *Rudolph*, where Leonard Harris, the lady's nephew, says:

we are all idealists when we are young. We begin in the clouds and as we are slipping away from existence we come nearer to existence in thought and feeling. We are born with wings but we find our feet are safest. (*CW*, 277)

Not only did Rosenberg attack the spirit of the age and hence came to hold perceptions which reflected those of Arnold, Eliot, or later, Richards and the Leavises, but he also received Eliot's and F. R. Leavis's acknowledgement. Eliot's acknowledged admiration of Rosenberg lies at the heart of his attack on the materialistic standards of modern English criticism:

Let the public, however, ask itself why it has never heard of the poems of T. E. Hulme or of Isaac Rosenberg. Let it trace out the writers who are not spoken of because it is no one's interest to speak of them, and the writers who are spoken well of because it is to one's interest to take the trouble to disparage them; and let the public also notice, in every case, who was the publisher. It will see, in the end, that the disease of contemporary reviewing is only a form of radical malady of journalism.²⁶

²⁶ T. S. Eliot, "A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry", Poetry Bookshop Chapbook, 1920.

F. R. Leavis, in his "Scrutiny: A Retrospect", which evaluated the achievement of *Scrutiny*, asserted that the discovery of Isaac Rosenberg was of real significance.²⁷ He reviewed *The Collected Works*, describing it as "a rare document of invincible human strength, courage and fineness."²⁸ He even attacked Eliot's passing reference to Rosenberg, but, as E. O. G. Davies noted, Leavis himself followed the example of Eliot.²⁹ Consequently, Rosenberg has achieved mere 'passing' appreciation; these major critics did not provide detailed examination of his 'fine' work. And hence, there turns out to be a need to return to the nature of modern English criticism where the differences, rather than the similarities with Rosenberg, are considered.

In talking about the failure of the romantic ideal in the present industrial society and the consequent rise of the door knocker, Rosenberg commented on Arnoldian theories about the need to replace religion with culture, about which he seems to have held some reservations. This is how he describes the door knocker, which becomes a symbol for Arnoldian thought, alluding to Arnold's theory of culture, a major aim of which is to address society as a whole:

It is a type of prostitution, for it is sold to all men; of helplessness, for it lies where all can wreak their will on it; of power, for it sets great forces in motion; of aristocracy, for it is lordly and imperious; of democracy, for it makes no distinction between low and high; of wealth, for like gold, it is the means of opening doors at its magic touch. It is the link of fraternity whereby so many divergent aims and minds touch hands. Sometimes knockers are peculiarly identified with the families of the houses to which they are attached, and the fate and fortune of the knocker is the fate and the fortune of the family. (*CW*, 275)

Such a description shows that the modern anti-romantic jargon is itself romantic. Being 'sold to all men' alludes to the social mission of criticism which claims to address all classes; hence it claims to be 'democratic', addressing the 'low and high' sections of the society, achieving a superficial sense of 'fraternity'. However, it

²⁷ See E. O. G. Davies, "Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Masters Thesis, Univ. of Nottingham, 1957, p. 207; originally F. R. Leavis, "Scrutiny: A Retrospect" in *Scrutiny*, Cambridge 1963, pp. 1-27.

²⁸ F. R. Leavis, "The Recognition of Isaac Rosenberg", *Scrutiny*, vol. I, no. 2 (September, 1937), p. 231.

remains 'aristocratic', in the sense of elitist. The fact that knockers share the fate of their families asserts that 'low' remains 'low' as does 'high'. Rosenberg even continues with examples of the fate of the 'low' individual:

In one family... the knocker invariably found its way behind the door, and the only disposition it ever showed to knock when it was in its place was to fall and knock the head off of a millionaire relation, who had just discovered them, and they were obliged to pay for his funeral. In another, the knocker was the cause of suicide. A friend of mine of aesthetic tastes, visiting his affianced, took prejudice to the knocker, because of its exceedingly ugly shape, and so fastidious was he that he would not knock; but finding the door open, and being of that passionate precipitate nature that despises convention, rushed in, and conceive his horror when he beheld his beloved in the embrace of a man (it happened to be her long lost brother just returned), and, infuriated, he dashed out and went straight to the river (not even stopping to pick up his hat), and there ended his sorrows... (CW, 275)

These perceptions of Rosenberg have undergone a sustained critique in *The Social Mission of English Criticism* where Baldick asserted that while English literary criticism developed from Arnold onward has attempted to be anti-theoretical, objective, disinterested and human in perspective, it has, in practice, proved to be the opposite.³⁰

Rosenberg's assessment of contemporary criticism describes it as "so enchantingly romantic and real; so human in its pathetic helplessness; so divine in its terrible significance of power, that we might sum up in it the epitome of humanity." (CW, 275) While, as found earlier, Arnold attacked the competition for power between classes, his criticism was designed to achieve authority, though not for his own class, but for the profession of the critic, the poet and the teacher of English.³¹ Arnold and his followers had elitist tendencies; of Eliot, for example, Williams said:

Eliot recognises the need for elites, or rather for an elite, and argues that, to ensure general continuity, we must retain social classes, and in particular a governing social class, with which the elite will overlap and constantly interact. This is Eliot's fundamental conservative conclusion, for it is

²⁹ Davies, p. 207.

³⁰ See Baldick, pp. 205-234.

³¹ Ibid., p. 225.

clear, when abstractions are translated, that what he recommends is substantially what now exists socially.³²

In trying to substitute the existing order of a governing class-minority, F. R. Leavis, Williams also argued, came to see the solution in substituting one minority by another, one which "is, essentially, a literary minority, which keeps alive the literary tradition and the finest capacities of the language."³³ In other words, the attempted empathy became, inevitably, sympathy, an act which for Rosenberg is simply 'human'; that is, natural and real.

Rosenberg investigated the future of such a prejudice, alluding to Arnoldian tendencies: "Let us see it in a prophetic far-reaching symbol of the religion of the future." (*CW*, 275). He expressed doubt about the coming success of such a trend and asserted that it "would depend on the aesthetic leanings and fashions of the future generation." (*CW*, 276) His suspicion is ambiguously connected with an implicit criticism of Christianity, an attack Joseph Cohen described as 'outmoded and decayed'.³⁴ Rosenberg says:

When we consider that the symbol of the Christian religion was erstwhile a sign of degradation, a gallows; how idealism has converted this type of human degradation into a symbol of divine beatific sanctity, does it need a great wrench of credulity to believe that a door knocker, which has so tremendous a significance, and is so much more infinitely romantic in form, might take its place and stand for the new religion. (*CW*, 276)

Again he asserts that, rather than being real, this trend is merely ideal. There are prerequisites for it to become a 'new religion' of the future; this is how he presented these necessary conditions that are to be fulfilled before it comes to be the future religion, with a vocabulary which echoes Arnold's, and hence criticises Arnoldian ambitions:

When culture has completed its emancipation from barbarism, [and] Christianity with its limitations, its self-sacrifice, its strange mendicant

³² Williams, p. 241.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

³⁴ Joseph Cohen, *Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1975), p. 40.

idealisation of poverty, its crown and banner of austere primitive barbarism the cross [has become] a thing that has been; and religion, generous, large in its conception of humanity, refined yet homely, usurp the vacated throne; the door knocker its sceptre.(CW, 276)

Even if it comes to be a future religion, it will remain diseased, claiming a conception of humanity and at the same time “refined yet homely”. It will not provide a new ‘religion’ or rule, and will rather “usurp the vacated throne”, providing it with a new symbol of monarchy, the door knocker, which will amount to a ‘sceptre’, an unpleasant symbol for Rosenberg, as discussed earlier. Similarly, Baldick assigned to modern English criticism an expansionist nature with a tendency aiming at taking over the role of religion, politics and science, and assigning their roles to the critic, who would come to have an inclusive and comprehensive mission.³⁵

Responding to the need for a literary tradition which represents the desired unity, the Leavises brought the idea of the society as a ‘herd’, which features in *Fiction and the Reading Public*; it was, Baldick argued, “not just a device to relieve the monotony of terms like ‘mob’ and ‘mass’, but the signature of a definite sociological theory derived from [W. Trotter’s] *Instincts of The Herd in Peace and War*”.³⁶ Baldick argued that the idea of the herd relates to physical and biological foundations and thus reflected a sense of pseudo-Darwinism, with sociology and biology having become allies to criticism.³⁷ Trotter’s book demanded the study of “the science of psychology... in relation to other branches of biology” in order to be “capable of becoming a guide in the actual affairs of human behaviour”; he tried to find scientific ‘biological’ terms to relate the “contest of moral forces” to “sources of national morale” which he found in animalistic instincts.³⁸ Animals’ instinctive priorities are self preservation, nutrition, sex, and gregariousness, the last of which Trotter highlighted, giving it a moral aspect in terms of the relative desire for

³⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 225-232 .

³⁶ Baldick, p. 180. W. Trotter, *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1916), imp. 1940.

³⁷ Baldick, p. 220.

³⁸ Trotter, p. 6-7.

gregariousness of different animals.³⁹ The need for group solidarity has two motives, reflecting a moral sense, offensive and defensive; hence, the wolf's group instinct is offensive and the bee's is 'morally' defensive.⁴⁰ The bee's commitment to the interest of the hive becomes a basis for Trotter's account of human herd instinct during the war, finding in it a moral basis for supporting social integration in biological and social terms.⁴¹ Trotter's text turns out to be an apology for British foreign policy:

We are already faced with the possibility of having to make profound changes in the social system to convince the working-man effectually that his interests and ours in this war are one.⁴²

Trotter's 'ours' clearly refers to the intellectuals for whom Trotter speaks, while 'his interests' refers to those of the working man, the illiterate lower class. Furthermore, the biological basis of Trotter's argument is rooted in racial terms as the analogy with the animal world makes evident.

Baldick alleged that a similar sensibility might be traced in Richards, whose theory of value was meant to function "within racial boundaries",⁴³ and which argued that the cultural decline was because of the "mixture of cultures that the printed world has caused".⁴⁴ These national tendencies based on 'race distinction' are considered to have been raised by the context of antagonism during the war and which "the formalities of victory did little to neutralise."⁴⁵ After the Great War, Paul Fussell asserted, the conflict was transformed into literary and critical discourse which was itself dominated by war imagery and diction.⁴⁶ And the same tendency is present in Arnold whose *The Study of Celtic Literature*, in which he traced the racial roots of English poetry to its Norman and Germanic heritage, reflected a similar

³⁹ Ibid., p. 15-20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 29ff; 101ff.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 125-6.

⁴² Ibid., p. 148.

⁴³ I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1924), p. 148.

⁴⁴ Richards, *Practical Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929), p. 339.

⁴⁵ Mulhern, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), P. 22ff.

awareness of 'race'.⁴⁷ Even his vocabulary which, Baldick claimed, enclosed such terms as Hebraism, Hellenism and Philistines, reflected a sense of 'race'.⁴⁸ Consequently, the language of these critics involves a racial discourse; but one meant to abolish class distinction and conflict. This seems to be another way of putting the old saying *if you want peace arm for war*; hence, a war now is waged, though perhaps unconsciously, against the 'other' race.

Rosenberg was a member of the working class and his poetry reflected class sensibility; but he was never separated from his Jewish racial heritage. And it is here where a major aspect of his reputation collides with modern English criticism. Consider the following appreciation of his work:

The poetry of Isaac Rosenberg... does not only owe its distinction to its being Hebraic: but because it is Hebraic it is a contribution to English literature. For a Jewish poet to be able to write like a Jew, in western Europe, and in a western European language, is a miracle.⁴⁹

This not merely exhibits surprise that a Jew was 'able to write like a Jew' but also an expectation that the Jewish poet should not and could not write in the guise of his race at the time. If disinterestedness and objectivity were major concepts for these modern English critics', partiality and subjectivity coloured their practice. The emphasis on criticism existing against the grain of class distinction is contradictorily limited and insular.

Rosenberg sought the kind of liberal literary appreciation which would overcome the Jewish stereotypes such as Shylock, an elaboration of whom is Fagin in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*.⁵⁰ Fagin "ranks second only to Shylock as one of the most memorable - and infamous - Jews in all of English Literature."⁵¹ He is described as real creature:

⁴⁷ Arnold, "The Study of Celtic Literature" in *CPW*, vol. iii, pp. 291ff.

⁴⁸ Baldick, p. 218.

⁴⁹ T. S. Eliot, "A Commentary" in *Criterion* (July, 1935).

⁵⁰ Derek Cohen, p. 25.

Fagin sat watching in his old lair, with face so distorted and pale, and eyes so red and bloodshot, that he looked less like a man, than like some hideous phantom, moist moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit ... His right hand was raised to his lips, and as, absorbed in thought, he bit his long black nails, he disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should have been a dog's or rat's.⁵²

Doubtlessly, such imagery influenced the Jews themselves and Rosenberg responds creatively to it, as in his admiration for Heine's "Princess Sabbath" which he enjoys for the idea it contains:

where the Jew who is a dog all the week, Sabbath night when the candles are lit, is transformed into a gorgeous prince to meet his pride the Sabbath. (CW, 261)

In a Jewish context of the Sabbath, the Jew is a prince while in the Gentile society he is a dog; and it is this prototypical social image which Rosenberg desired to abolish. It is argued that the stereotypical anti-Semitic literary representations of Jews, at least after medieval portrayals, were meant to reflect on a prejudice within Christian society, as in the case of Shakespeare, as some critics asserted, and of Dickens, particularly with respect to Riah in *Our Mutual Friend*.⁵³ Ross Arther argued that the English audience demanded it this way; that is, any Jew who does not appear within the limits of the prototype is rejecting the possibility of being converted into a Christian:

a medieval Christian ... would treat real Jews the way stage Christians treat stage Jews. What would happen when there was no real miracle to correspond to the stage miracle, when no one was raised from the dead and no crucifix spoke, and the real Jew did not convert? ... It was, after all, during the medieval period that accusations of ritual murder against the Jews brought about their expulsion from England ... On the other hand, it was shortly after the productions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta* that Jews were allowed to return to England.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Deborah Heller, "The Outcast as Villain and Victim: Jews in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*, in *Jewish Presence in English Literature*, p. 40.

⁵² Quoted in Heller, p. 46; originally from Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Peter Fairclough, with introduction by Angus Wilson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966).

⁵³ See Derek Cohen, pp. 25-26; see also John Russell Brown, Introduction, *The Merchant of Venice*, The Arden Edition (London: Methuen, 1964), p. XXXIV; see also Ross G. Arther, "Literary Jews and the Breakdown of the Medieval Testament Pattern", in *Jewish Presence in English Literature*, p. 127.

⁵⁴ Arther., pp. 126-127.

Rosenberg desired a time when being a Jew would, on the other hand, mean the opposite. This nature colours Rosenberg's work as his following words assert:

I don't know whether it's justifiable... to remind you that this is not the first time I have wearied you with my specimens of desperate attempts to murder and mutilate King's English beyond all shape of recognition. (*CW*, 180)

The supposed assault on 'King's English' seems a comment on the racist 'high-minded' critical terminology of the time.

Though his Jewish identity generated verse with many Jewish allusions, Rosenberg was aware that a racist modern criticism necessitated suppressing his Jewish identity; this is reflected in his response to Bottomley's advice that he should write Jewish plays, by which, Rosenberg feared, he would be excommunicated, as quoted earlier. Thus he is rather ironic when he "thanks [Mr. Lesser] for the information about my being a British Subject." (*CW*, 197) This is related to the first British Rome Prize, 1913, which was an annual competition for the prize of £200, p.a. renewable for three years in the British School at Rome; candidates were to be British subjects. (*CW*, 197, note 3). And accounting for the nature of the modern age he found that, as before, modern reformations had not yet freed themselves from the curse of race:

Luther brought to bear upon the moral world what Darwin has upon the physical world... Religious freedom, freedom of thought, has prepared the way for heights of daring and speculation. Social freedom is still as far off as ever, but we dare dream of it. (*CW*, 301)

Rosenberg's distinction between religious and social freedom is significant. Freedom of religious practice does not achieve social equality; that is, religious freedom does not neutralise social bias. As Julius puts it: "English anti-Semitism was... an affair of social exclusion. Jews have not been harried, but kept at a distance."⁵⁵

Rosenberg rejected traditional critical clichés; when criticised for not having a 'healthy style', he ironically responded: "do you feel ill when you see my work[?] I know some feel people faint looking at Michel [*sic*] Angelo." (*CW*, 194) He aimed

at avoiding the traditional poetic treatments, traditional in his own sense. He wanted criticism to concentrate on the 'poetic subject'; he saw proper criticism as that which appreciates poetic vision for its own sake, and preferred "the poetic subject ... Here feeling is not separated from intellect; our senses are not interfered with by what we know of facts." (CW, 183) This is another way of expressing his preference for elevating poetry in terms of ideas rather than meanings.

A clear example of this is Rosenberg's rejection of 'prostituted' ideas in expressing the meaning of war; of "poor Rupert Brooke" (CW, 248) he said:

I did not like Rupert Brooke's begloried sonnets for the same reason [feeling them commonplace]. What I mean is second hand phrases 'lambent fires' etc. takes from its reality and strength. It should be approached in a colder way, more abstract, with less of the million feelings everybody feels; or these should be concentrated in one distinguished emotion. (CW, 237)

The idea of 'million feelings ... in one distinguished emotion' alludes to Brooke's "Town and Country" which Rosenberg read and liked, (CW, 240): "Here, million pulses to one centre beat" (line 5). Indeed, this represents a distinctive perception of 'tradition' which parallels Eliot's idea of 'tradition and the individual talent'. Eliot, famously proclaims: "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."⁵⁶ However, Rosenberg did not accept worn out expressions and ideas; 'second hand phrases'. His perception of tradition was influenced by his patron's insistence on imitating the masters while for him it meant an appreciation of poetic experience rather than an imitation of it; he perceived tradition differently:

I believe that all poets who are personal - see things genuinely, have their place. One needn't be a Shakespeare. Yet I never meant to go as high as these - I know I've come across things by people of far inferior vision, that were as important in their results, to me. (CW, 202)

⁵⁵ Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), p. 12.

⁵⁶ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1920), repr. 1989, p. 50. Related to this is Rosenberg's perception of 'time' which parallels Eliot's. It also parallels Bloom's idea of 'poetic strength' in that a poet should use, but never imitate, the past.

Once again Rosenberg asserts his innate hostility to 'second hand phrases'. Tradition is not to be imitated; there should always be new ideas, which develop, revise, rethink and revitalise past ideas. But the nub is this: Rosenberg's class and race did not place him in a position from which he could lay claim to an English tradition. Indeed, the conflicts of class, race, religion and recognition which he experienced in life scarred his imagination, and left a distinctive mark on his poetry; a mark of distinction that was instrumental in his alienation from the trend of English poetry in the early twentieth century.

Responsive Voices

Critical appreciation of the period in which Rosenberg lived encompasses such confusing literary clichés as '1890s verse', 'Edwardian era', 'Georgian Movement' and the 'war poetry' of the First World War. Critical discussion of the authors of the time has relied heavily on the previous labels; that is, these categories have become the margins within which the authors of the time have been approached, placed, misplaced or even denied a place. This has indeed a double danger: first, authors who belong to more than one category might be marginalised within the limitations of a certain label; second, those who do not belong to any of these ready names are treated as aliens and hence denied critical recognition. Rupert Brooke, for example, was both a 'Georgian' and a 'war poet'; but he is more celebrated as the latter, even though he died early in the conflict. Though contemporary, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats were not Edwardians; nor were they Georgians nor even war poets. However, they were leading figures, editors and publishers, which enabled them to impose their characters on the literary and critical scenes of the age; that is, they were to 'label' rather than to be labelled.

On the other hand, Rosenberg suffered both critics' misclassification and lack of classification. He produced poetry during these three periods, Edwardian, Georgian and during the War; yet he is best known as a war poet, a term which

hinders recognition of the real voice of Rosenberg.⁵⁷ He was grievously misclassified as a Georgian, by virtue of a single poem -- a fragment from *Moses*, beginning "Ah Koelue" -- which was published in the first anthology of *Georgian Poetry* 1916-17.⁵⁸ His poetry was mostly considered 'obscure'; at worst immature, incomplete and having an unfinished quality, and at best promising.⁵⁹ But I would argue that his essence is marginalised by the limitations of the ready labels used in approaching his epoch, and, hence, his poetry is misunderstood as carrying signs of an inability to rise up to the ideals of the previous labels. Rather than being approached in wider contexts, where his innovative and revolutionary voice is recognised, he is considered to have remained an immature, perhaps even failed, 'Georgian'. Why, then have, these labels appeared? What is the alternative?

Kenneth Millard, in his cogent account of Edwardian poetry, asserted that "critics have tended to neglect those who do not conform to the literary fashion of the time and whose contribution to literature is not really categorised."⁶⁰ Similarly, E. O. G. Davies observed that:

Isaac Rosenberg was a revolutionary in verse, and it is this that upset the critics; they did not know where to place him, and they took the easy way out, that of dismissing him.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Most studies of Rosenberg approached him as one of the poets of the Great War. Even those who believed that he maintained an individual voice, such as, for example, Vivian de Sola Pinto and John Silkin, did so. See the following where Rosenberg is approached as a war poet: Da Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940* (London: Hutchinson House, 1951); Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), repr. 1987; George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the First World War: Contexts and Themes* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); John Johnston, *English poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964); Jay Winter, *Sites of Mourning, Sites of Memory: the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), repr. (1996).

⁵⁸ Edward Shanks, "A Georgian Poet" in *Daily News* (1 June, 1922).

⁵⁹ Charles Powell, "The Obscure Poet" in *Manchester Guardian* (1 August, 1922). For similar criticisms, see also Da Sola Pinto, p. 151; Edward Marsh, *A Number of People* (London: Heinemann and Hamish Hamilton, 1939); *The Sunday Times* (4 July, 1937); *The Daily Telegraph* (13 July, 1937); Laura Riding and Robert Graves (eds.) *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), pp. 220-23; *The Observer* (4 July, 1937).

⁶⁰ Kenneth Millard, *Edwardian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 6.

⁶¹ E. O. G. Davies, p. 201.

Recognising the inconvenience of the critical appreciation of the period, Philip Hobsbaum asked for a revaluation of the authors of the time, drawing particular attention to Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas and Rosenberg, finding in their poetry essential roots of English modernism: "if they had survived, [they] would surely have constituted a big challenge to the prevailing standards in poetry: as big a challenge, perhaps as in their own time was presented by the Romantics."⁶² The era in which Rosenberg found himself started soon after the beginning of a new century and the accession of a new king in 1903. This contributed to the dominant feelings of the 'newness' of the age and the tendency for change and renewal. Many critics emphasised this Edwardian sense of its being the beginning of a distinctive era which would witness the formulation of a new English society on all levels: social, literary, political, economic and so on.⁶³ Writing with the benefit of over half a century's hindsight, Sir Sidney Roberts claimed: "For the political and social problems of the Edwardian era are, in fact, the very core of some of the most significant literature and drama of the period. In poetry, it is true, the association is not so clearly reflected."⁶⁴ Consequently, criticism and publishing of poetry reflected the spirit of the age: the poverty of poetry and the financial inefficiency of its publication. R. H. Ross alleged that one cannot think that the Edwardian age "produced, with one or two obvious exceptions, any but mediocre verse."⁶⁵ However, it is not only that the 'poverty' of the period's poetry had consequently incurred such a critical reception; it was also that the unsympathetic critical perception of poetry had controlled its production and reception. As Derek Hudson

⁶² Hobsbaum, "The Road Not Taken", in Dominic Hibberd (ed.), *Poetry of the First World War*, (London: MacMillan, 1981), p. 101; Hobsbaum argued that Eliot's and Pound's contribution is not to be seen as an English but rather as an American Modernism. This is like Terry Eagleton's argument on the theme of the expatriate, outcast, foreigner and immigrant in twentieth-century English literature which is influenced by 'foreign' figures such as Eliot. See Eagleton, *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (1970), p. 7.

⁶³ For a discussion of the sense of distinction the Edwardian era assumed, see Richard Ellman, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations*, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 115; Samuel Hynes's assertion that the Edwardian phase incorporated a "consciousness of its own separateness from what went before and what followed." (*Edwardian Occasions: Essays on English Writing in the Early Twentieth Century*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 1) Frank Kermode also considered the 1890s as reflecting a sense of an ending and the first ten years of the twentieth century a counter sense of a beginning. (*The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 97.

⁶⁴ S. Roberts, *Edwardian Retrospect*, (London: English Association, 1963), p. 6.

puts it: "the period was not, in general, notable for poetry."⁶⁶ More recently, Kenneth Millard has traced an emerging sense of change in the social context that preceded the Edwardian era, claiming that the exhausted romantic ideals of the end of the nineteenth century, the persecution of Oscar Wilde and the popularity of Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, in which the author attacked the decadent literary ideals of the age, "contributed to the discrediting of poetry as a means of serious artistic expression."⁶⁷ He also asserted that the social realism of Edwardian literature came as a reaction against the decadence of the 1890s verse, the art-for-art's-sake movement and "the abstract themes of nineties verse"⁶⁸ but claimed that "there were many good poets of the turn of the century who do not fall into the creative pressure groups of the time... those who cannot be assimilated into a movement find themselves conspicuously isolated."⁶⁹ Hence, the Edwardian era denotes a historic epoch dependent not simply upon a monarch's reign.

The term 'Georgian' is used to refer to the poets who are included in the five anthologies of *Georgian Poetry* published in 1912, 1915, 1917, 1919, and 1922, under the sponsorship of Edward Marsh.⁷⁰ In the preface of the 1911-12 anthology, Marsh rationalised the publication of the collection as being a result of what he believed to be a new renaissance in English literature: "This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting a new strength and beauty."⁷¹ In *Georgian Poetry*, Marsh's aim was to distinguish poets who appeared to him to have a distinctive poetic merit above those whom, he believed, were inferior Edwardians; in the second volume, published in 1915, Marsh confessed a mistake in including G. K. Chesterton, T. S. More and Roland Ross in the previous volume: "they belonged

⁶⁵ R. H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: Rise And Fall of a Poetic Ideal 1910-22*, (London: Faber, 1967), pp. 29-30.

⁶⁶ D. Hudson, "Reading" in *Edwardian England 1901-14*, ed. S. Nowell-Smith, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 308.

⁶⁷ Millard, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Millard, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Timothy Rogers believes the term should be used as such; see Rogers (ed.), *Georgian Poetry 1911-1922: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. XI.

⁷¹ Edward Marsh (ed.), *Georgian Poetry 1911-12* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1912), preface n. p.; see also *A Number of People*, p. 320.

in fact to an earlier poetic generation, and their inclusion must be allowed to have been an anachronism.”⁷²

It might be argued that ‘Edwardian’ and ‘Georgian’ are labels which distinguish between different political regimes rather than established and completed poetic movements, hence revealing the futility of labelling; furthermore, they are epochs which play a major role in the disintegrated view of the authors of the early twentieth century rather than encouraging reader to approach them as belonging to one major thread of modern English poetry. Therefore, if it is considered the only poetic venture of merit to have occurred in the post-Victorian era, the Georgian ‘movement’ becomes an expansion and continuity of Edwardian poetry; this means overcoming the historic anachronism of the term ‘Georgian’ and neutralising the inferior perception of Edwardian poetry, which becomes an early part of Georgian poetry and a contribution to it. Rogers alleged that “At least in its beginnings, ‘Georgian poetry’ was a successful business venture rather than a literary movement.”⁷³ This reminds us of the earlier publishers’ attitude towards publishing poetry, which seemed financially an unprofitable venture. And as seen earlier, Eliot considered Rosenberg’s neglect an indication of materialistic and biased modern journalism and publication, at a time when poetry was trapped in the period’s financial and material tendencies as well as the control of the upper classes on publication and patronage. Eliot started the earlier phases of his career in a bank; in 1917 he entered the Colonial and Foreign Department of the Lloyds Bank in London. Rosenberg lived in severe poverty and had to publish and publicise his work; he was trapped by the materialistic tendencies of the time, when publishing policies were not concerned with poetic ‘excellence’ as much as with ‘sales’ and financial profit. Patronage and publication in Rosenberg’s time placed poets who, like him, were trapped by the boundaries of class, in a position where they had to follow the dictates of the existing system, or otherwise suffer oblivion.

⁷² Marsh, *Georgian Poetry 1913-15* (1915), preface n. p.

⁷³ Rogers, p. 16.

As regards *Georgian Poetry*, Marsh was the judge and jury; only he had the power to decide who was to be honoured as a Georgian and who to be denied that place. The control of Marsh shows also how poetry and its publication were under the control of a certain class, governed by elitism. As Rogers puts it: "like other truly personal collections, their [the anthologies of *Georgian Poetry*] distinction and limitations reflect both the sureness and the limits of their editor's taste."⁷⁴ Marsh, who after the remarkable success of the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* once attributed the fall in the sales of the later volumes, to "a falling off in public receptivity",⁷⁵ was a major patron for Rosenberg; but though he never became free of him, as discussed in Chapter Four, unlike so many others, Rosenberg could never compromise his own poetic principles for the sake of his publisher. Therefore, Marsh kept accusing Rosenberg's poetry of being 'obscure'.

In 1951 da Sola Pinto labelled the period between 1880-1940 as that of the 'crisis in English poetry'.⁷⁶ The crisis came as a result of commercialisation which industrial civilisation incurred, where unlike the earlier feudal society of the countryside, by the beginning of the twentieth century England had become an

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 14; Norman Douglas has a stronger belief in this; he takes it as a sign of the existence of "Eddie Marsh's gang"; see *Looking Back: An Autobiographical Excursion* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), p. 227.

⁷⁵ Marsh, *A Number of People*, p. 329.

⁷⁶ Da Sola Pinto; however, Da Sola Pinto's notion of crisis has roots in the writings of F. R. Leavis. Iain Wright has drawn attention to the notion of 'crisis', which comes in line with the need for 'revaluation', in Leavis's writings, along with the emphasis on "the social function of literature and a critique of 'mass civilisation'... commercialised journalism and manipulative advertising" which provide essential vocabulary for "much later work such as Williams's *Culture and Anarchy* and *The Long Revolution*..." (Iain Wright, "F. R. Leavis, the Scrutiny Movement and the Crisis" in Jon Clark et al, *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 37-8). Leavis's notion of 'crisis' comes in association with images of 'confusion', 'chaos', 'lack of form' and 'disintegration':

the boundaries are gone, and the arts and literature of different centuries and periods have flowed together. (*Mass Civilisation*, p 19)

the cultures have mingled, the forms have dissolved into chaos. (*D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge, 1930), p. 28)

Amid all this mass of destruction and disintegration... (Leavis, quoting D. H. Lawrence, in "Restatements for Critics" in *Scrutiny*, vol. I, no. 4 (March, 1933), p 319)

Leavis's terms became central to later Leavisian apostles such as Vivian de Sola Pinto and Philip Hobsbaum, the latter particularly taught by Leavis.

industrial city-society, with new social structure: "In the new England of the twentieth century there were new classes without any tradition of culture," and the society witnessed the development of plutocracy on the one hand while on the other end of the social scale there were "the horrors of the English slums."⁷⁷ Rosenberg was aware of these developments around him, as discussed earlier. In addition, when da Sola Pinto describes the underprivileged class as: "[a] world of dark courts, broken glass, rags, bones and soul destroying poverty", he echoes Rosenberg's "Dawn Behind Night" where it is claimed that, "In the life or death they dole us from the rags and bones of their store."⁷⁸ Broadly speaking, Georgianism was a reaction against the "speech that the Edwardians used in their streets."⁷⁹ The Georgians, da Sola Pinto explained, wanted poetry to be "pleasant, dignified, moral, not difficult" and to present the "countryside".⁸⁰ Marsh's conservatism, as the editor and sponsor of *Georgian Poetry*, can be traced back to his parentage and upbringing; his father a professor of surgery at Cambridge, Marsh himself later a secretary to a number of Cabinet members; his mother, to whom his father entrusted the upbringing of Marsh, "A devout, puritanical lady" who controlled the young Eddie's reading lists, and of whom Marsh says she was the "all-pervading influence" in his early life", trying every possible way to "protect her son" against all impure and radical works of literature.⁸¹

D. H. Lawrence's comment on the first anthology of *Georgian Poetry* is unusually suggestive:

This collection is like a big breath taken when we are waking up after a night of oppressive dreams... Everything was taken from us. And now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning, but we have not forgotten the terror of the night...

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 9-12; 112-14; see also Hynes, p 13.

⁷⁸ Da Sola Pinto, p. 115.

⁷⁹ Millard, p. 4ff; Da Sola Pinto, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Da Sola Pinto, p. 117.

⁸¹ See Rogers, p 14ff and *A Number of People*, p. 1.

In almost every poem in the book comes this note of exultation after fear, the exultation in the vast freedom, the illimitable wealth that we have suddenly got...

It is a book-ful of romance that has not yet quite got clear of the terror of realism.....⁸²

Lawrence's words are full of energy; the symbolic comparisons reveal how the collection designates a great desire for joy; but the joy is an escape from the sordidness of realism, a reaction against the terrible conditions of the social setting. However, these lines assert that the emerging sense of exultation the collection represents is not real; the 'terror of realism' still exists, even though the collection is full 'of romance'. Ironically, Lawrence calls such romantic escape an 'awakening' and reality a 'dream'. Escapist as it is, the collection has pastoral associations with the rural countryside and the idealised remote past of pastoral joy, rather than the urban city or the present everyday reality of their time: reading these lyrics, one has the feeling of having emerged 'out of prison', thriving anew under 'the whole sky'.

Eliot also said that "the Georgian poets insist upon the English countryside."⁸³ Recognising this propensity for 'countryside' in the anthology of *Georgian Poetry*, Siegfried Sassoon said that it is "compromised with various trees," casting its genealogy into question.⁸⁴ Commenting on the anthology elsewhere, Eliot described it as a Neo-Romantic venture: "Keats, Shelley and William Wordsworth punish us from their graves with the annual scourge of the Georgian Poetry."⁸⁵ Relatedly, da Sola Pinto considered Georgian poetry: "the fantasy of an upper middle class which feared reality and refused to face the modern crisis at the very moment when it was assuming dimensions that threatened the whole of the European structure."⁸⁶ As a fantasy and a rejection to face reality, it

⁸² D. H. Lawrence, "The Georgian Renaissance", in Rogers (ed.), pp. 102-4; originally from *Rhythms* (March 1913).

⁸³ Eliot, "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" in Rogers (ed.), p. 181; originally from *The Egoist* (September 1917).

⁸⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, "A Poet's Experiment in Candid Criticism" in Rogers (ed.), p. 249; originally from *The New York Times* (February 1920).

⁸⁵ Eliot, "Verse Pleasant and Unpleasant" in Rogers (ed.), p. 214; originally from "Georgian Poetry, 1916-17 and "Wheels; A second cycle" in *The Egoist*, (March 1918).

⁸⁶ Da Sola Pinto, p. 133.

turns out to be an escape. Later in his account, da Sola Pinto claimed that "Brooke was too intelligent to shut his eyes completely to the ugliness of the modern world," to whom the "daydream of the unspoiled English Countryside" functions "as an anodyne."⁸⁷ In this sense, such poetry becomes a false disguise, an external embellishment of a depressing reality. Brooke was a celebrated Georgian poet whom Marsh supported by all means, publishing his work in the *Georgian Poetry* and later writing his biography. Rosenberg, who did not accept the period's high estimation of Brooke's poetry and considered it "second-hand phrases", as discussed earlier, was conservative in telling this to Marsh and when Brooke died, Rosenberg wrote to Marsh to console him:

"I am sorry- what else can I say. But he himself [Brooke] has said 'what is more safe than death?' For us is the hurt who feel about English literature, and for you who knew him and feel his irreparable loss." (*CW*, 214).

Rosenberg is alluding to Brooke's "Safety":

We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing.
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;
Safe through all safety's lost; safe when men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

Brooke was the leader of the group Virginia Woolf called "the Neo-Pagans", who represented, as Paul Delaney claimed, a "new version of a rural myth... a British form of escape from modernity," which is "euphoric and romantic".⁸⁸

The association of Georgian ideals with the upper middle-class is implied in Delaney's reference to "so many cherished British myths" at the time celebrated and promoted by the Georgians and their editor and publisher "Eddie [Edward] Marsh": "Dining Room Tea', punting on the Backs at Cambridge, breakfasting under the apple blossom at the Orchard, Grantchester, all the camping and bathing and 'so many parties'...the living in the country, in endlessly sociable youthful leisure was

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

⁸⁸ See Paul Delaney, *The Neo-Pagans: Friendship and Love in the Rupert Brooke Circle* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1987), p. XIX; XX-XXI.

not just enviable (which, indeed, it was), but was what really mattered.”⁸⁹ This attitude can be seen in Brooke’s “Dining-Room Tea”:

When you were there, and you, and you,
Happiness crowned the night; I too,
Laughing and looking, one of all,
I watched the quivering lamplight fall
On plate and flowers, and pouring tea
And cup and cloth, and they and we
Flung all the dancing moments by
With jest and glitter...

(Lines 1-8)

Delaney also drew attention to the fact that “it should be obvious, also, that all those Neo-Pagans festivities were enjoyed at someone else’s expense: those who washed and cooked, and those whose labour created the massive surplus that financed the great Edwardian party.”⁹⁰

These characteristics show that Georgian ideals were escapist and nostalgic and hence associated with pastoralism. John Johnston alleged that “there could be no doubt that the ‘new’ poetry [Georgian poetry] took its main inspiration from traditional pastoral themes and materials,” yet characterised by “the loss of contact with contemporary reality” as they thought of their poetry as a “timeless refuge”.⁹¹ The pastoralism of the Georgians, da Sola Pinto argued, “is not... the creation of a vivid, ideal way of living, the heightening of elements in contemporary life. Rather it is a poetry that deliberately turns away from the contemporary situation.”⁹² In other words, Georgian idealism is reactionary; it insists on living in a past that is totally absent from the present, hence turning out as a negative rejection of everyday reality, proving unable to change the present and simply maintain nostalgia for the desired past.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. XXIII.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. XXIII.

⁹¹ Johnston, pp. 4; 5-6.

⁹² Da Sola Pinto, p. 133.

Arguing about the disadvantage of Rosenberg's class and race in such a context, Silkin said:

given therefore Marsh's kind of cultural attachments, it is not surprising that the patronising note should emerge even more strongly after Rosenberg was dead. In *A Number of People*, he [Marsh] wrote : 'poor little Isaac Rosenberg, who never came into his kingdom, surely one of the most futile sacrifices of the War, for except courage he had no quality of the soldier and if he had lived, he must have done great things.' There is something dismayingly second-hand about these assertions, and distant also, in the recreation of 'the soldier' as an epitome of the human condition, which destroys any sense of a suffering, active human being such as Rosenberg's letters revealed him to have been....

Rosenberg then was effectively isolated from a public, from large sections of the society, and from any critic at all perceptive to his work, which considering the kind of literary fashions then prevailing, is not surprising.⁹³

Here Silkin indirectly draws attention to the problem of classifying Rosenberg: no less socio-politically determined was the term 'war poet' than 'Georgian' and 'Edwardian'. It has many side effects from which many of the poets of the time suffer when treated with it.

The war was welcomed enthusiastically by most, if not all, sections of the society. Marc Ferro argued that at a time when social unrest was dominant because "the mass of twentieth century men were outside public affairs" the conflict was initially conceived as a 'liberator' which brought many people closer to such movements as communism and socialism. Hence, when the war was declared it provided a substitute to the people's revolutionary hopes and so millions in England and America volunteered before conscription was introduced.⁹⁴ Ferro stated that the war was easily promoted as a religious crusade and as an ameliorator of the social scene; "no one foresaw that the war would cause great revolutions... that this 'European Civil War' would threaten the foundations and values of western society."⁹⁵ While it provided a better chance, or context, for reassessment and

⁹³ Silkin, *Out of Battle*, pp. 256-7.

⁹⁴ Marc Ferro, *The Great War 1914-1918*, trans. Nicole Stone (London: Routledge and Kegan Ltd., 1969), pp. 3;8.

change in literary ideals, the Great War deepened the chasm from which literary consensus was suffering in the pre-war era. There was a conflict between the past and the present; after traditional ideals of 'heroism', 'glory', 'sacrifice', 'crusades', nationalism, magnanimity and prowess in the early phases of the war, such realistic arguments as war being a defence of no-man's-land, unnecessary suffering, false and un-heroic religious crusade, started to emerge during the later stages of the conflict. As Jay Winter argued, the initial "patriotic appeals derived from the fact that they were distilled from a set of what may be called 'traditional values'-classical, romantic, or religious images and ideas widely disseminated in both elite and popular culture before and during the war."⁹⁶ The war, horrible as it was, placed greater emphasis on issues of life and death, rather than literature and poetry; hence Wilfred Owen, in his most celebrated statement, asserts that his subject was the pity and how "poetry is in the pity".⁹⁷

There were different motives beyond the initial enthusiastic acceptance of the war. Because the war came at a time when at least one third of Britain's population, Barbara Tuchman showed, lived "in chronic poverty, unable to sustain the primal needs of animal life"⁹⁸, the underprivileged classes hoped that the it might bring social injustice to an end. The leisured classes welcomed it because "the war seemed a release from boredom, an invitation for heroism, a remedy for decadence," in light of a dominant sense of "war psychosis."⁹⁹ Of course, as Parfitt puts it, "the war, as seen by young officers of privileged background, is likely to be a picture defined by the social shaping of these men. Julian Grenfell's war was never likely to be Isaac Rosenberg's."¹⁰⁰ One aspect of such a background, Parffitt found, is evident in the stereotypical perception of the war poet as a young officer advocating heroism such as Brooke or disapproving of the war as did Sassoon and Owen, while Rosenberg,

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

⁹⁶ Winter, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Wilfred Owen's preface to his projected volume of war poetry; see Johnston, pp. 163-4.

⁹⁸ Barbara Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914* (London: H. Hamilton, 1966), Macmillan, 1980, p. 356.

⁹⁹ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: the Outsider as Insider* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), Imp. 1988, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Parfitt, p. 14.

unlike these, was not an officer.¹⁰¹ But on the official level, at least, the war seemed an outlet for social outrage, providing a means to avoid social clashes by containing the social problems and channelling them toward an outside enemy, again at a time when socialism was active and strikes reached a high level (1000 strikes took place between January and July 1914).¹⁰² Social and political problems were prevalent: the Irish question, and the Suffragette movement were also beginning to press the British state.¹⁰³ Hence, as Hynes claimed, it was "A civil war, a sex war, and a class war."¹⁰⁴

Dominic Hibberd's claim that during the war a general interest in pro-war 'national' poets "made serious criticism almost impossible, and the more responsible critics felt obliged to hold their peace", might provide a compelling explanation for the neglect of Rosenberg; but then again, it might be due to the nature of his poetry, which is anything but heroic propaganda for the war.¹⁰⁵ Jean Liddiard suggested that Rosenberg's neglect was caused by his death at the front which meant classifying him as a war poet, when "to the general reading public, Rupert Brooke was still the representative soldier poet."¹⁰⁶ In 1965, Joseph Cohen stated the problem clearly and criticised the label, saying that a major aspect of the community's understanding of the term 'war poet' comes from society's prevailing archetypal attitude of 'hero-worship', saying that "Rosenberg is dismissed ... because he neither looked nor acted like a hero and could not possibly have been fashioned into one."¹⁰⁷ Martin Gray has drawn attention to the role the publishing policies at the time played in hindering real appreciation of the war poets, asserting that that persistence of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰² Parfitt, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰³ See Da Sola Pinto, p. 130.

¹⁰⁴ Hynes, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1990), p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Hibberd, p. 13; excluding Rosenberg's poem "The Dead Heroes".

¹⁰⁶ Jean Liddiard, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half-Used Life* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), p. 249.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Cohen, "The War Poet As Archetypal Spokesman" in *Stand*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1965), p. 26. See also John Onions, *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War, 1918-39* (London: MacMillan, 1990), pp. 20-3.

term is more of purely historical rather than literary or poetic reasons: the term connects the poets who fall under it

with real events, with history and fact, that is something used to validate the poetry unthinkingly... the common use of war poetry in classroom would seem to be based on this kind of premise: here is poetry about a special kind of intense experience, verifiable from historical sources, experience so real as to have lead to the death of some poets.¹⁰⁸

Once again the socio-political background proves to have played a major role in the recognition of the poets of the time as in the story of Brooke who was made a national hero because his poetry conforms to the religious and political propaganda for war.¹⁰⁹ However, this idealism did not last and the myth of the war, which the propaganda fomented, began to disappear in the later stages of the conflict, to which Sassoon's and Owen's poetry belong. Their poetry incorporates what Winter considered an attitude based on bringing "the aesthetics of direct experience" to bear on the act of imagining the war, in a way far removed from the 'lies', or 'Big Words' of the older generation who sent them to fight and die in France and Flanders."¹¹⁰ The poems of Sassoon and Owen have nothing of the romantic portrayals of the war that belong to Georgian fantasy and idealism, with their poetry simply, in Johnston's words, functioning "as conscience, voice of anger and pain."¹¹¹

Indeed, the term 'war poet' is highly problematic. Many poets, such as Sassoon and Brooke, contributed poetry to earlier periods, such as the Georgian era, and therefore they were not 'war poets' in an exclusive sense of the term, since they started writing before the war and wrote poems whose subject matter is unmartial in spirit. Furthermore, the term might refer to both pro-war and anti-war poets; it is mostly applied to male writers when, in fact, many non-combatants as well as women wrote about the war.¹¹² The term 'war poet', then, limits the recognition of

¹⁰⁸ Martin Gray, "Lyrics of the First World War: Some Comments" in Gary Day and Brian Docherty, p. 61. See also Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg publishers Ltd., 1993), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Delaney, p. 212.

¹¹⁰ Winter, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Johnston, P. 19.

¹¹² Nosheen Khan, *Women's Poetry of the First World War* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1988).

those writers who would be better approached as poets in the wider sense, as in the case of Rosenberg, whose sense of himself as a 'war poet', when he later enlisted, transcends the essential limitations of the label. Indeed, it is anachronistic and inaccurate to classify Rosenberg simply as a war poet for he started writing long before the outbreak of war; and therefore the term is unjustly exclusive, since his pre-war poems outnumber his war-poems, and because his war poetry incorporates many of the preoccupations, fascinations and obsessions he held long before the war started. In other words, the war in his poetry is not the major issue; rather it has to be regarded simply as a manifestation of his own experiences of conflict and struggle in the years leading up to his enlistment.

Even though he had pacifist tendencies and thus later came to damn it, Rosenberg welcomed the war. He joined up the army not for "patriotic reasons," (*CW*, 227) nor because he "had to forswear my fatherland" (*CW*, 218), but because "there is certainly a strong temptation to join when you are making no money." (*CW*, 214). As Silkin puts it: "Rosenberg only hopes that, if there must be war (which he deplures), then it will cleanse."¹¹³ He regarded the war as a force that would help manifest the proposed social and literary 'change' in symbolic terms. Consequently, in "On Receiving News of the War" war becomes an allegory of the proposed transformation:

O! ancient crimson curse!
Corrode, consume.
Give back this universe
Its pristine bloom.

(Lines 17-20)

Beth Helen Roberts alleged that when the war destroyed the conditions under which art could be created, so that "the pastoral tradition had done nothing to prepare English artists for the war", the war did not stop Rosenberg, because "the culture that produced Rosenberg.... The Chasidic Jewry of Eastern Europe, had long acquaintance with wars, evil and the expression of those concepts in its arts."¹¹⁴ Les

¹¹³ Silkin, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ Beth Helen Roberts, "The Female God of Isaac Rosenberg: A Muse for Wartime" in *English*

Murray puts it more bluntly: "Rosenberg carried with him into his wartime period a great many continuities and poetic interests from the past; he probably never thought of the war as his prime theme, in the way Owen did."¹¹⁵

In "On Receiving News of the War", Rosenberg describes the war as:

In all men's heart it is.
Some spirit old
Hath turned with malign kiss
Our lives to mould.

(Lines 9-12)

He perceives war as a reflection of humanity's instinctive aggression; an aggression that is inherent in 'every man's heart'. Hence war is not new but rather familiar from remote history 'Some spirit old'; and it is a manifestation of the "ancient crimson curse!" (line 17). In fact, this perception is rooted in the context of his life in Europe at the turn of the century. Freud is one of the writers who at the time attempted to account for why "we have told ourselves, no doubt, that wars can never cease so long as nations live...", relating it to "instinctual impulses which are of elementary nature, which are similar in all men and which aim at the satisfaction of certain primal needs".¹¹⁶

Freud argued that, at times of war, the individual becomes "inhibited" by primitive evil to turn out as "a cog in the gigantic machine of war".¹¹⁷ And Daniel Pick alleged that such influence of war is evident in "images of willed machines and automaton-like human beings [which] preoccupy so many modern fictions and discussions", hence war becomes "the mechanical human beast".¹¹⁸ In "Marching (as Seen from the Left File)" Rosenberg depicts the soldiers as moving parts in the war machine:

Literature in Transition, vol. 39, no. 3, 1996, pp. 320.

¹¹⁵ Les Murray, "Isaac Rosenberg" in *Quadrant*, Victoria, Australia, vol. 24, no. 3, p. 55.

¹¹⁶ Freud, "Thoughts on War and Death", *SE*, vol. 14, pp. 276; 281.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale Univ. press, 1993), pp. 1; 3.

Like flaming pendulums, hands
 Swing across the khaki -
 Mustard-coloured khaki -
 To the automatic feet.

(lines 4-7)

The image of 'flaming pendulums' is a reflection on the period: time on fire. The soldiers are marking time, drilling for the war, ignited and fired up. The word 'mustard' is also telling, alluding to the 'mustard gas' - $(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{CL})_2\text{S}$, a chemical that burned and blistered the skin - first used in the First World War. Unlike such soldiers, however, Rosenberg made up his mind not to let the war control him; not to become another pair of 'automatic feet' himself.

In short, Rosenberg's major concern was to use the war to deepen his previous experiences of conflict and struggle, rather than to give them up.

I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting... I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on. (*CW*, 248)

Unlike Owen who felt that the poet and his poetry were trapped in the war and its terrible degradation of man, where the poet and poetry are in 'the pity', Rosenberg raised the poet above the war, in order to control it rather than to be mastered by it. Hence Johnston asserted that in the case of Rosenberg, poetry produces the pity, unlike Owen's case where pity produces poetry.¹¹⁹ In fact, for Rosenberg the war was a metaphor for life, the society in which he lived, and represented aspects of his own social interaction which he had already perceived in terms of fighting, struggle and conflict. Rosenberg is unique in this respect, for he is the only poet of the Great War who understood that war *symbolises* life. As Glenn Carnegie has alleged : "army life and the trenches were not really all different from life in the east end of London for Rosenberg; instead they constituted merely an intensification and a slightly different setting from the lessons he already learned in the harsh and realistic

¹¹⁹ Johnston, p. 245.

school of the Whitechapel.”¹²⁰ But the determination to escape the pity of the war was not an easy task for him.

The difficulty of resisting the disillusionment of war is evident in “Chagrin”; the poem’s imagery, in fact, reveal how free Rosenberg’s mind was, and how difficult it was for him to remain so:

Caught still as Absalom,
Surely the air hangs
Like hair of Absalom
Caught and hanging still.

(Lines 1-4)

Rosenberg here employs the Biblical story of the death of Absalom, the favoured son of King David who betrayed him. During a great battle, Absalom was fleeing on his mule when his hair was caught in overhanging thick branches of a great oak tree; as his mule ran on, Absalom was left dangling alive in the air. Finding him, Joab stabbed him in the heart with three daggers and Joab’s soldiers finished him off and threw his body in the forest. (II Samuel: 18, 8-17). Along with the massive carnage of the battle in which Absalom was killed - twenty thousand men slaughtered (II Samuel, 18: 7) - the Biblical story stresses the indifference of Nature, in the form of the fatal forest of Ephraim, which devoured more men than did the sword. (II Samuel, 18: 6; 8).

In “Chagrin” Rosenberg develops a double image - the hanging hair of Absalom and the poet’s thought - with economy and assurance. The story of David’s son, hanging in the air, is used to reveal the poet’s struggle against the pressures of the war; the struggle to express in words and ideas the reality of the conflict which is as harsh as the forest in the Biblical story. The poet’s thought echoes Absalom’s situation:

Of mute chagrin, my thoughts
Hang like branch-clung hair
To trunks of silence swing,

(Lines 8-10)

¹²⁰ Glenn Alan Carnagey, “Isaac Rosenberg: From Innocence to Experience”, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Univ. of Tulsa. 1984, p. 269.

Elaine Scarry has wittingly discussed the difficulty of expressing pain - physical or mental - in language, because pain is characterised by its “unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language”; that is, pain’s resistance to language is “essential to what it [pain] is”, because “pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language.”¹²¹ Scarry thus argues that “a great deal, then, is at stake in the attempt to invent linguistic structures that will reach to accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language.”¹²² The task of bringing a language that would express others’ pain and distress, as in the case of the poet, is even more difficult.¹²³ In a letter to Marsh in 1917, Rosenberg complained against the helplessness of language: “Now when my things fail to be clear I am sure it is because of the luckless choice of a word that would flash my idea plain as it is to my mind.” (*CW*, 260). And this is because he wanted to avoid ‘second hand phrases’ and commonplace sentiments, for he knew ‘distress’, ‘fear’ and ‘depression’ long before the war; instead he wanted to express the invisible pain and distress experienced in war and, when he found that this was difficult, he himself was in pain: “in my agony” (“The Immortals” line 5). Scarry has commented on the struggle to invent a language that can effectively describe pain, finding that such language materialises when “the human voice only become visible”.¹²⁴

The difficulty of putting the unseen into words is evident in Rosenberg’s allegorical use of images of ‘fingers’. In “Marching (as Seen From the Left File)” he refers to “Blind fingers” (line 14); in *Moses*, the need for a powerful expression:

...boils to my finger-tips,
Till my hand ache to grip
The hammer - the lone hammer
That breaks lives into a road
Through which my genius drives.

(Lines 40-3)

¹²¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. press, 1985), pp. 4; 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The image of the hammer is central in expressing pain. As Scarry puts it:

it should be noted that it is of course true that in any given instance of pain, there may actually be present a weapon (the hammer may really be there) or wound (the bones may really be coming through the skin); and the weapon or wound may immediately convey to anyone present the sentient distress of the person hurt; in fact, so suggestive will they be of the sensation of hurt that the person, if not actually in pain, may find it difficult to assure the companion that he or she is not in pain.¹²⁵

Rosenberg thought of his mission both as a reporter of the invisible war and as a re-creator of broken lives: "For a power to soak in and knit/ It all into tougher tissues" (lines 35-6). Hence it is not surprising that his fingers ache after such a hammering. The hammer is, perhaps, the poet's pen; consequently writing for him is as violent and tough - and even painful - as hammering. And as for images of 'bones', they are abundant in Rosenberg's poetry, even before the war as, for example, in "Dawn Behind Night" discussed earlier. In his war poems the image became dominant; consider "Dead Man's Dump":

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched,
Their shut mouths made no moan.

(Lines 7-9)

It is too late for the 'sprawled dead' to respond; the only possibility of hearing a 'moan' is in the distant rhyme with 'bones'; but then they give sound only as they are 'crunched' to powder.

Unlike the Georgians' neat pastoral images of 'home', Rosenberg's landscapes are repulsive images of destruction. His idea of 'home' was not essenced in rural peace, but rather in the East End, where he fought with constraints of race, class, religion and unachieved recognition. War for him was a symbol of human experience; essentially, his own. Throughout his work he is concerned with struggle; and the war came to represent his feelings of conflict. Hence in "Break of Day in the Trenches" he speaks of "the same old druid Time as ever" (line 2); this

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

was not new for him. Nor was the “sardonic rat” with which he identifies: “Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew/ Your cosmopolitan sympathies.” (lines 7-8). The rat represents the human degradation the war brought about; but once again, Rosenberg had encountered this - and the rodent - before the war.¹²⁶ In Northrop Frye’s terms, rather than an apocalyptic or pastoral symbol, the rat is a demonic creature which, surprisingly, appears familiar, thus, ironically representing the “transposition of human and animal roles that the trench scene has brought about,” a transposition which encloses “images of terror - the opposite of pastoral emotions.”¹²⁷ In “Home-Thoughts from France” the persona lives “In the land of ruin and woe” (line 7); but such abstracts were neither confined to Flanders, nor to Browning. In “Dead Man’s Dump” he reports that “The wheels lurched over the sprawled dead” (line 7); the word ‘sprawled’ is a favourite of his since it recurs in “Break of Day in the Trenches” (“Sprawled in the bowels of the earth” line 17) and suggests massive inertia.

It was claimed in Chapter Two that Rosenberg found in the war echoes of the life of the slums; it was yet another version of underground existence, of the living death the underprivileged experienced. His sense of subterranean dwelling dominates his war poems, reflecting the social circumstances he had experienced in the East End before the war. The soldiers who are “Sprawled in the bowels of the earth” (“Break of Day in the Trenches”, line 17) feature again in “Dead Man’s Dump”, where they are buried in Earth, a burial that has always been predestined for them:

Earth has waited for them
 All the time of their growth
 Fretting for their decay:
 Now she has them at last!
 In the strength of their strength
 Suspended - stopped and held.

(Lines 14-19)

¹²⁶ Bernard J. Verkamp argued that the use of animal imagery in describing conditions at war, as well as images of exhibition such as titles like ‘the show’ and ‘exposure’, represent the human degradation experienced at war. See Verkamp’s *The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval And Modern Times* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993), p. 64.

In fact, it is evident in Rosenberg's poems that his mind was controlled by images of predetermination, of being 'doomed'. Hence in "Dead Man's Dump" he speaks of "doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth" (line 29); and in "Daughters of War" of "doomed earth" and "doomed glee" (line 50). However, the attitude here is similar to pastoral elegy where death is accepted as an inevitable aspect of the natural cycle of rebirth in nature. In pastoral elegy, the poet speaks of "the natural cycle of life and death," where death becomes "a common experience, one of the two experiences we shall share and therefore one of the two moments in time at which we seem to be without distinction or rank."¹²⁸ The pastoralist expresses intimacy with the world of death and even, as Northrop Frye says, "is often so closely associated with the dead as to make him a kind of a double or shadow of himself."¹²⁹

The war is, in effect, anti-pastoral as it destroys nature, and offers no sense of future; hence, the experience of conflict invokes a desire for its opposite:

... In bleeding pangs
Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,
Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.

(Lines 45-7)

This possibly alludes to Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", through an echo in 'pangs' and the desire for lost joy: "The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,/... Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride" (lines 96-71)¹³⁰. But the poem offers yet another case of Rosenberg's idea of 'hearing' the voices of the dead:

Will they come? Will they ever come?
Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,
...
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face.

(Lines 71-9)

¹²⁷ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 252.

¹²⁸ Andrew V. Ettin, *Literature and the Pastoral* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 118-9.

¹²⁹ Northrop Frye, "Literature as Context: Milton's *Lycidas*" in Rogers (ed.), p. 207.

¹³⁰ Quotations from Gray are from H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (eds.), *The Complete Poems: English, Latin and Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

Dominic Hibberd suggests that the line "Will they never come?" "seems to be a mocking echo of the slogan on a recurring poster, probably put out in 1914, which... reads, 'will they never come?'"¹³¹ However, such an attitude is not unlike pastoral ideas about death as a return to a mother earth, particularly in a poem that deals with death. The 'dead face' is 'grazed' as a means of burial; and any pastoral rebirth - which might occur if the face is 'grazed' upon, as a pasture - demands Rosenberg's 'iron shepherd'. 'Iron' is an attribute of the war and also of urban industrial society, rather than the traditional countryside.

In "Returning We Hear The Larks", the elements representing the horror of war such as 'threat', 'death', showering of bombs and bullets' are mixed with contrary elements of 'safe sleep', 'joy', 'songs', 'girls' and 'dreams; a mixture that makes Hobsbaum suggest that "all the soldiers want is an oasis in the desert."¹³² Paul Fussell asserted that:

The imaginative behaviour of these soldiers [of the Great War] indicates that the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of the pastoral. Pastoral - if no longer the body of imagery and emotions associated with it - provides the model world by which the demonism of warfare is measured.¹³³

Elsewhere he said:

if the opposite of war is peace... the opposite moments of war are the moments of pastoral. Since war takes place outdoors and within nature, its symbolic status is anti-pastoral.¹³⁴

This is exactly the larger perception implied in Hobsbaum's 'oasis in the desert', in the sense of wishful thinking where the harsh conditions of the trenches impose on the soldiers some thoughts of the lost pastoral joy.

¹³¹ Dominic Hibberd, "Some Contemporary Allusions in Poems by Rosenberg, Owen and Sassoon" in *Notes and Queries*, vol. 26, 1979, pp. 333.

¹³² Philip Hobsbaum, "Two Poems By Isaac Rosenberg", *Jewish Quarterly*, 16, no. 4 (1968-69), p. 25.

¹³³ Fussell, *Killing in Verse and Other Essays* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1988), p. 182.

¹³⁴ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 231.

Elliptically, in “Returning We Hear The Larks”, the first stanza mixes anxieties of life and death:

Sombre the night is.
And though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lurks there.

(Lines 1-3)

Again in the second stanza, the two attitudes are held together:

Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
This poison-blasted track opens on our camp -
On a little safe sleep

(Lines 4-6)

The description of the soldiers’ movement as ‘dragging’ represents their troubled mentality, where the limbs hold them back either because they are exhausted or because they are haunted by thoughts of danger. Such a representation is strengthened by their having ‘limbs’ rather than the whole body, so intensifying the inner mental and physical fragmentation, the opposite of which is the mental equipoise of the poem’s comprehensive holding of the contraries.

These contraries are also harmonised in the third stanza

But hark! joy - joy - strange joy.
Lo! heights of night ringing with unseen larks.
Music showering our upturned list’ning faces.

(Lines 7-9)¹³⁵

Joy becomes ‘strange’, first, because it is not expected in the trenches where feelings of fear, threat and death dominate and, second, because the sense of joy the soldiers have is associated with uncertainty. ‘Upturned list’ning faces’ is ambiguous: the referents might be the soldiers, alert to possible attacks; to that same soldier in whose mind the trench and pastoral scenes are contrasted; or even to the soldier and his enemy, both caught in the same position. This description connects the flesh and abstract memories, the body and the mind, yet is truthful to the soldiers’ experience of the conflicting physical and mental aspects that the war brings.

¹³⁵ ‘Upturned’ might be an echo of Browning who uses it five times; “Those upturned faces choking with despair” (“Sordello”. Book The Fourth, line 735). The phrase is also used in “Dramatis Personæ”, Epilogue (line 26); “The Ring And The Book”; VII. Pompilia (line 957); “The Book And The Ring” (line 7).

Owing to such lack of straightforward emotional involvement in the war, Hobsbaum reports, Siegfried Sassoon refused to call Rosenberg a war poet.¹³⁶ Sassoon said that “Rosenberg was not consciously a ‘war poet’” and also affirmed that “his few but impressive ‘Trench Poems’... have the true controlled directness of a man finding his true voice”, which once again stresses Rosenberg’s desire to have his own genuine utterance.¹³⁷ In fact, the sense of ‘hearing’, as also present in “Dead Man’s Dump” earlier, and ‘listening faces’ designate a relation with the precursor, with whom Rosenberg had always fought. In “In War”, Rosenberg hears again:

The good priest came to pray;
Our ears half heard,
And half we thought
Of alien things, irrelevant;

(Lines 42-4)

At the surface of these lines there is the idea of the use of religion in rationalising fighting as well as death during the war, a matter with which Rosenberg dealt in a manner similar to Freud as discussed in Chapter Two. However, these lines bring into account the fact that, during the war, Rosenberg’s poetry incorporates intensive recourse to the suffix ‘half’. In “Dead Men’s Dump”, ‘a half used life’ passes out of the nostrils and the mouth; in “Louse Hunting”, Rosenberg returns to his idea of partial hearing:

When our ears were half lulled
By the dark music
Blown from Sleep’s trumpet.

(Lines 23-5)

Perhaps the music Rosenberg hears comes from ominous voices foretelling and expecting destruction, like those which Coleridge heard in “Kubla Khan”: “Ancestral voices prophesying war”. (line 30). Rosenberg’s imagery of halves recurs in other works; in “Raphael” Rosenberg says that “Never have I reached/ The halfway of the purpose I have planned” (lines 68-9); and he complained about the “half-told...

¹³⁶ Hobsbaum, “Two Poems By Isaac Rosenberg”, p. 25.

¹³⁷ Sassoon, a foreword to Ian Parsons (ed.), *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979) repr. 1984, p. ix.

story” of the “wavering glory” (“Fragment XXXIV” lines 3; 5). In *The Amulet*, the torn amulet is said to have remained a half “And half is away” and Amak is “half-stifled” (lines 160; 199). Consequently, it seems that on the front Rosenberg decided to celebrate the fragmented, the diminished in their own terms; such was his “partial fate”. He was a poet of incompletion. Nonetheless, this conspicuous use of the suffix ‘half’ is also a manifestation of his ‘half-heartedness’, reflecting the division he felt between his sense of himself as a soldier and as a poet, experiencing the difficulty of creating a genuine poetic voice of his own.¹³⁸

Rosenberg’s poems are dominated by symbolic images of ‘voices’ and ‘sounds’, in association with ‘faces’ and ‘mouths’. In the last line of “August 1914” he mentions “A fair mouth’s broken teeth”; in “Home-Thoughts From France” he refers to “fragile faces” and “pitiful mouths”, along with “faces startled and shaken” (lines 2; 9). In “Daughters of War”, as seen earlier, the soldier have a “doomed mouth” and in “Dead Man’s Dump” “Their shut mouths made no moan” (line 9). The poet’s voice is influenced by the horror and distress experienced by hearing the voices of the suffering soldiers:

The voice that once could mirror
Remote depths
Of moving being,
Stirred by responsive voices near,
Suddenly stilled for ever.

(“In War” lines 11-15)

Opposed to this ‘suddenly stilled’ voice, Rosenberg’s responsive voice attempts “To reach the living word” (line 65). Such heavy emphasis on the facial and the vocal is essentially significant in Rosenberg’s war poems; it is in line with his attempt to reveal hidden aspects of the war and defamiliarise its conventional language. In this sense, like the soldiers’ soul coming out of the nostrils and the mouth in “Dead Man’s Dump”, the war comes out of Rosenberg’s mouth. The ‘voice’ symbolises the poet’s creation of a language that essences the war; and the face basically represents the destroyed soldiers, for it is on their “corroding faces” (“Daughters of War” line 29), where expressions of horror and distress appear. While inexpressible

¹³⁸ A similar attitude is evident in Tennyson’s poetry with “an extraordinary... recourse to the word half.” Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (London: MacMillan, 1972), second ed. 1987, p. 51, footnote.

signs of pain appear on the soldiers' faces, images of this suffering linger on Rosenberg's face; in "The Troop Ship", while he is restless and sleepless, and even when he tries to sleep, "men's feet/ Are on your face" (lines 9-10).

In fact, the 'corroding faces' which troubled Rosenberg's mind have contributed to his distinctive sense of language; in "Daughters of War", the voices of the soldiers who moan become inspiring 'daughters of war', with their "great lifted face" (line 4) and Rosenberg refers to the voice of one of these inspirational figures:

Whose new hearing drunk the sound
Where pictures, lutes, and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought.
Essenced to language, thus -

(Lines 45-8)

This is the key to Rosenberg's idea of language where the war is told to be 'essenced to language'. Pain, horror, violence and death lie at the internal world of the soldier and hence the language that expresses them should translate them into observable forms, by projecting them on the external world; a manner which for Rosenberg is not a question of 'rendering' but rather 'essencing'. Ironically, Rosenberg mentions 'pictures, lutes and mountains' when, as seen earlier, his poetry depicts shattered landscapes of devastation and degradation, and where his language becomes a means of detonation.

Nonetheless, the idea of 'essencing' language alludes to Rosenberg's interest in involving visual aspects in his writing. We have earlier seen him laying much emphasis on 'hearing' and 'listening', which consequently find their ways in 'voicing' and speaking; he also emphasised 'seeing' which necessitates visualising the matters he addresses in his poetry, particularly because war requires a great deal of visual involvement. As Scarry puts it:

Hearing and touch are objects outside the boundaries of the body... This objectlessness, the complete absence of referential content, almost prevents it from being rendered in language: objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal. But it is also its objectlessness that may give rise to imagining...¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Scarry, pp. 161-2.

In fact, his idea of 'essencing' is rooted in his skill as an artist for he evidently fuses his two talents - painting and poetry - together and hence paints in words. This matter will be investigated fully in Chapter Six.

Rosenberg's allegorical images of amputated bodies, crushed faces and bones, aching fingers, doomed speechless mouths, as well as shattered landscapes and demonic animals and creatures, are essential to his struggle to 'essence' the war to his language. But these images are also in line with his pre-war days and experiences when he struggled to 'voice' and speak out the conflicting poles of his life, to make them visible and observable. And when he revolts against 'silence', as, for example, in "Ode to David's Harp", discussed in Chapter One, it becomes clear that the silence he reacts against is not merely occult with the hidden and camouflaged realities of the war but also involves the hidden discrepancies in society. In "Dawn Behind Night" his statements are rooted in the social scene: "Lips! bold, frenzied utterance, shape to the thoughts that are prompted by hate/ Of the red streaming burden of wrong we have borne and still bear;" (lines: 1-2). Again he here emphasises the continuous sense of their "despair" (line 4) which "we have borne and still bear." And like the soldiers' "shut mouths [which] made no moan" in "Dead Man's Dump" (line 9), Rosenberg, in 1909, was speaking of "the silence that follows the sob" ("Dawn Behind Night" line 5). Hence in *Moses*, a verse play written much later during the war, and which depicts the revolt against Abinoah, who threatens to "circumcise" the tongues of the Jews, (line 331), Rosenberg defends his own race - along with the working class - against those who would suppress a people's voice. The defence his poetry offers amounts to the responsive scrutiny of "each slight clue, each monosyllable" (line 418) of his own and his oppressor's language; and having held together various elements in verbal equipoise, he then splits them apart so that, from this careful detonation, there emerges Jewishness, class, and race as unique essences. Therefore, it becomes clear that the sense in which Rosenberg was a 'war poet' carries along with the conditions of the trenches continuities of struggles, conflicts and hostilities which he knew long before the war of 1914-18.

Chapter Six

'Essenced to Language'

Blown Words

Rosenberg admitted:

I suppose we are all influenced by everybody we come in contact with, in a subconscious way, if not direct, and everything that happens to us is experience; but only the few know it. (*CW*, 182)

As his life continued, Rosenberg himself became increasingly aware of the vicarious nature of his art; the extent that his own experience of other writers determined the shapes and sounds of his own verse. Consequently, Rosenberg stressed the importance of paying attention to "secret stabs in words, in looks, in gestures" [*The Amulet* (line 145)] and the need to "read hard the scrawled lines," (*Moses*, line 275).

Philip Hobsbaum has worked hardest to define the complexities of Rosenberg's 'scrawled lines'; in particular, its indebtedness to what might be termed an English tradition. The essential characteristic of the language in "Returning We Hear The Larks", Hobsbaum argued, is the deliberate ambiguity of its imagery:

Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
By dangerous tides,
Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies there,
Or her kisses where a serpent hides.

(Lines 13-16)

Within these friable lines, the sense is blown far and wide. The image of "blind man's dreams on the sand/ By dangerous tides" carries also "four or five possibilities that are best held in some mental equipoise": of a blind man dreaming that he is no longer blind and/or that he is walking on the sand; of a paranoiac blind man having a nightmare.¹ In addition, there is what Hobsbaum calls a 'metaphoric' meaning: the association between the girl's kisses and the hiding serpent, Hobsbaum argued, might also be an identification with Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* which can be seen

¹ Philip Hobsbaum, "Two Poems By Isaac Rosenberg", *Jewish Quarterly*, 16, no. 4, (1968-69), p. 24.

(in light of the sense of a relationship between Adam and Eve) to imply “a fatal love affair,” the lover now being as ignorantly blissful as the dreaming blind man.² In this connection, the sightless individual might be Milton, on whose sonnet ‘When I consider how my light is spent’ Rosenberg commented in a letter as follows:

When Milton writes on his blindness, how dignified he is! how grand, how healthy! What begins in a mere physical moan, concludes in a grand triumphant spiritual expression, of more than resignation; of conquest. (*CW*, 190)

In the space of a few lines, Rosenberg sees a journey from pain to victory, a ‘conquest’ over visionlessness, with the speaker aspiring to be among the four highest orders of angels who ‘stand and wait’ around God’s throne.

Hobsbaum considered the following images to be the centre of the poem, calling them the “experiential core”, which explained the rest of the poem.³

Death could drop from the dark
As easily as song -
But song only dropped.

(Lines 10-12)

This suggests a confused experience where the wrong choice might be made and the fortunate outcome results from luck rather than successful judgement. The experience of war has a similar sense of uncertainty:

And though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lurks there.

Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
This poison-blasted track opens on our camp -
On a little safe sleep.

(Lines 2-6)

Survival and death are both possible in the war, the soldiers having their lives and being aware of the threat, yet desiring survival, “a little safe sleep.” Here Hobsbaum singles out an ingenious treatment of the dialectic of life and death where joy in the former is strengthened by possibilities of the latter, the security implied in “safe

² *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

sleep” arising from the threat of oblivion the soldiers experience.⁴ War turns out to be a sharpening of the possibilities of life; danger strengthens the hold on survival.

Hobsbaum concludes his discussion by identifying skill and subtlety as “the prime characteristics of Rosenberg’s poetry,” represented by a “masterly use of plot” and “association”, and essenced in an “elliptical” nature.⁵ Furthermore, Hobsbaum considered “Returning We Hear the Larks” to be a treatment of war experience only insofar as it was the part of an allegory in which “the literal narration does not exist for its own sake as much as an illustration of some larger truth”; hence, the poem “is not ‘simply’ about the dangers of love, any more than it is ‘simply’ about the ecstasies of war.”⁶ Nevertheless Hobsbaum also claimed that love was a major theme in “Chagrin”; “Our eyes holding so much” is seen as the “archetypal locked eyebeams of two lovers”⁷, his ‘archetypal’ directing us towards an allusion to Donne’s “The Ecstasy”: “our eye-beams twisted, and did thread.”⁸ The influence of Donne is central because Rosenberg read him thoroughly especially during the war when he had with him a collection of Donne’s poetry: “I have with me Donne’s poems” (*CW*, 221); “I have only taken Donne with me.” (*CW*, 223). Indeed, Rosenberg’s war poem “Louse Hunting” is an example of his experiment with metaphysical conceits, building an extended and elucidated argument on the soldiers’ struggle at the front, through a single image, of hunting lice, stretched out to the full. Such experiment comes later in his career, for it took him time to come to terms with Donne; “if I didn’t quite take to [him] at first, you understand why.” (*CW*, 181). His poetry, Rosenberg thought, needed an advanced level of thought: “a great deal of Donne seems a sort of mental gymnastics, the strain is obvious, but he is certainly wonderful.” (*CW*, 198). The same might be said of Rosenberg. Of Donne he once said:

³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-8.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 24; 25.

⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸ All quotations from Donne are from C. A. Patrides (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete Poems* (London: David Campell Publishers Ltd., 1991)

I have certainly never come across anything so choke-full of profound meaningful ideas. It would have been difficult for him to express something commonplace, if he had to. (*CW*, 183).

The commonplace subject of Donne's poem 'The Flea' becomes a frame for unrequited love; in Rosenberg's hands the insect gives pleasure:

A flea whose body shone like bead
Gave me delight as I gave heed.

(Lines: 1-2)

The roots of Hobsbaum's suggestive account of Rosenberg lie in D.W. Harding's emphasis on the poet's treatment of the war experience as one in which the significance of life is inseparable from the suffering and waste; in which it is impossible to detach the significance of war from the human life the poet knew.⁹ Hobsbaum carried this point further, finding evidence in the suggestive language and imagery of uncertainty within verse that mixes war with love and sex. Harding, too, detected in *The Unicorn*, and in "Daughters of War", a connection between the experience of war and that of sex. This is not unexpected since Rosenberg described his play to correspondents as involving the story of a rape of a Sabine woman by a race of men, so symbolising the war and the horrors of war. (*CW*, 257; 260; 261; 270) Harding ascribed the combining of such experience to an act of presenting both "before either simple attitude has become differentiated... a blending of two attitudes" where death becomes a living experience.¹⁰ Hobsbaum's idea of "intended ambiguity and ellipsis", then, has its roots in Harding's description of Rosenberg's technique as the "rapid skimming of images and [the] undifferentiated mass of ideas", a description borrowed from Rosenberg who says "the rapid skimming of images and thought, as in nature itself." (*CW*, 291).¹¹

⁹ D. W. Harding, "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", *Scrutiny*, vol. III, no. 4 (March, 1935), pp. 358; 363.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

Hobsbaum's discussion orbits sweetly around Rosenberg's relation to the past; indeed, his arguments are meaningless without clear associations with prior traditions. The allusion to *Paradise Lost* and the image of the 'blind man' could be seen, in light of Bloomian revisionism, as anxieties against the past; and such anxieties also recur in "Daughters of War":

Whose new hearing drunk the sound
Where pictures, lutes, and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought.
Essenced to language, thus -

(Lines 45-8)

Here there is an emphasis on the language to which something more than the superficial description of nature is 'essenced'. Such superficial elements are reflections of a larger truth beyond them, that of the 'thought' mixed with it; the thought is not even clear, it is simply a 'loosed spirit' of this thought. However, the sense of 'new hearing' and the consequent influence on the poet's voice, as implied in 'drunk the sound', suggests a mixture of past and new voices 'mixed' together; voices that can be heard in Rosenberg's words, particularly when he asserts that "Bruised are our words" in his poems "Even Now Your Eyes are Mixed with Mine" and "The Mirror", both titles of which reveal the act of mixing two visions together.

The idea of 'essencing' thought to sound is evident in two poets Rosenberg read avidly: Lascelles Abercrombie and Francis Thompson. Abercrombie (1881-1938), was a poet and critic, who served as Professor of English Literature at Liverpool University between 1919 and 1922, before moving to Leeds University where he stayed until 1929. His first volume of poems, *Interludes and Other Poems*, appeared in 1908, and of this volume Rosenberg wrote to Miss Seaton in 1915: "what is your best living English poet? I've found somebody miles and miles above everybody - a young man, Lascelles Abercrombie." (*CW*, 208). Abercrombie, in turn, appreciated Rosenberg:

A letter reached me from Lascelles Abercrombie who I think is our best living poet- this is what he says. 'A good many of your poems strike me as experimental and not quite certain of themselves. But on the other hand I always find a vivid and original impulse; and what I like most in your songs is your ability to make the concealed poetic power in words come

flashing out. Some of your phrases are remarkable; no one who writes poetry would help envying some of them.” (CW, 224).

Clearly, Rosenberg's idea of poetic language appealed to Abercrombie who apparently shared such interest. Excited at this feedback, Rosenberg reported it to Miss Seaton. (CW, 226). Later Rosenberg identified his conditions with Abercrombie's: "I hear that Abercrombie is over-working himself and doing himself no good; a condition of being I can claim to rival him in." (CW, 250). Rosenberg mentioned reading Abercrombie's "The Olympians", "Hymn to Love" and "Judith". (CW, 209; 245; 250). Significantly, "Judith", a narrative poem, celebrates an Old Testament theme, treating the suppression of the Jews by Holofernes; while the male Jews are unable to raise above their submission to their oppressor and revolt against him, Judith takes up the mission, sacrifices her body allowing Holofernes to have it, meanwhile beheading him and releasing her fellow race. The solution of the Jewish problem is presented in "Judith" in association with music and sound, as in Rosenberg's "Ode to David's Harp":

What can Jerusalem the hill-city
Offer to keep God's love from Babylon?
Judith: What but the beauty of holiness, and sound
Of Music made by hearts adoring God.

(Lines 228-31)¹²

The poem must have appealed to Rosenberg, and possibly influenced his theme, sketched out in his verse play *Moses*, of the Jews' need to overcome their underprivileged conditions by revolting against their oppressors. "The Olympians", another narrative poem, shows a son seeking to take over the role of funding the family, trying to convince his mother to give up her job as a washer of corpses. She tells him about her misery, caused by her husband and the father of her son, whom the son kills. The plot has some parallels with Rosenberg's *The Unicorn* and *The Amulet* both of which feature a son-father-mother relation. Nonetheless, "The Olympians" concludes in a symbolic idea of change and originality; the mother says to her son: "Well, you shall have your way. From to-day on,/ Let no one come for

¹² All quotations from Abercrombie are from *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie* (Humphrey Milford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1930)

washing corpses.” This is possibly a message to the belated poet, living symbolically among the precursors’ corpses; let their bodies lie as they fell.

Abercrombie's "Hymn to Love", Rosenberg said, is "the poem I like best of modern times"; "the great thing of modern times, and far above anything of his I know." (*CW*, 248; 249; 245). Evident in this poem are images of 'essencing' thought and meaning to sound:

As thou, Love, were the deep thought
And we the speech of the thought; yea, spoken are we

.....

Like fierce mood in a song caught,
Loose words, of meanings broken
As voices are we in the wordly wind,

• • • • •

as air to a sharpen sound, to mind
For love doth use us for a sound of son,
Making our souls like syllables.

Lines 2-3; 6-8; 17-9; 24-7)

Rosenberg's idea of hearing an entity that 'drank the sound' which consequently carries the 'loosed spirit of a thought', before finally being 'essenced' to language' could be paralleled with Abercrombie's 'speech of the thought ... in a song caught', which consequently reconstructs a 'broken meaning'. In both cases the language is a way to and from the essences of a mind.

However, the word ‘essenced’ is also reminiscent of Francis Thompson (1859-1907); a poet and a prose writer, who moved from Preston to the East End of London in 1885, and published his first volume of poems in 1893, which - along with later publications - gained him popularity, and notoriety as ‘a man with more words at his command than he knows what to do with’¹³. The word ‘essenced’ features several times in Thompson’s poems. In “After Her Going”, he says: “‘Ah me! My very flesh turns soul,/ Essenced,’ I sighed, ‘with bliss’”; the exclamation is part of a lover’s cry of delight at regaining his beloved, and an assertion that his

¹³ Allan Rodway, 'The Last Phase', *From Dickens to Hardy*, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982) p.399.

physicality is sublimated into spiritual love.¹⁴ It is in line with Rosenberg's idea of the spiritual power of his 'Daughters of War', who become a symbol for overstepping the constraints of the 'flesh' (lines 7-8). These daughters, whom Rosenberg "saw in prophetic gleams", "Beckon each soul aghast from its crimson corpse and the days of the flesh." They are inspirational figures, muses, mingled with his creative endeavour to write poetry.

Rosenberg's idea of a 'spiritual sexuality' which is rendered in "their naked dances with man's spirit naked" (line 2), also alludes to Thompson's wild "Anthem":

Nor, though we hold the sacred dances good,
Shall the holy Virgins maenadize: ruled lips
Befit a votaress Muse

(Lines 197-9)

And this could be a root for Rosenberg's idea of the maiden's voices (lips) that 'drunk the sound'. In this poem Thompson uses the word 'essenced' to describe "the sweet-essenced body of a woman." (line 100). Earlier in the poem he reveals a sentiment that could have appealed to Rosenberg:

Mother, we put these fleshly lendings on
Thou yield'st to thy poor children
We are bound to beggary, nor our own can call
The journal dole of customary life.

(lines 44-51)

The word 'dole' features in Rosenberg's poetry, as detailed in Chapter Four, in line with a working-class theme, representing the physical pressures in the life of the poor. Rosenberg's war poem "Daughters of War" addresses the spiritual aspect of the soldiers' psyche while experiencing physical threats of death, fear of death being an obstacle against spiritual growth; hence just as Thompson says: "In a little dust, in a little dust,/ Earth, thou reclaim'st us" (lines 301-2) Rosenberg speaks of "males/ Clean of the dust of old days" (lines 55-6). In "Dust Calleth to Dust", a poem in which the body appears as an impediment against spiritual and imaginative freedom, Rosenberg once again echoes Thompson, reporting "A little dust", and asking to him

¹⁴ All quotations from Thompson are from *The Poems of Francis Thompson*, ed. Wilfred Meynell (London: Messrs. Burns and Oates Ltd., repr. By Oxford Univ. Press., 1951)

“dear brother/ How long must you guard that fierce temple of god?/ So fixt to the earth and a foe to the wind.”

In addition, Rosenberg mentioned enthusiastically reading Thompson’s “Dream Tryst” and “The Mistress of Vision” (*CW*, 183; 198). In the latter, Thompson’s images of sound are abundant: “Like the unseen form of sound,/ Sensed invisibly in tune” (VI); “O lend me/ The terrors of that sound,/ That its music may attend me/ While I tell the ancient secrets that lady’s singing found.” (XII). It is clear here that ‘music’ and ‘sound’ might be prior texts initiating the belated poet. This association comes superficially later: “That I cannot find/ Music in the holy poets to my wistful want.” (XXVI). ‘Holy poets’ might suggest established precursors, or even prior shepherd-prophets. It was argued earlier that Rosenberg’s first known poem, “Ode to David’s Harp” celebrates the power of the prophet’s music. Nonetheless, Thompson’s “The Mistress of Vision” has Biblical associations in referring to “Golgotha” (XIV) and “Calvary” (XV). Significantly, the former image features in Rosenberg: *The Unicorn* refers to “the tower of skulls” (line 210), or Golgotha, the hill of crucifixion, a place of huge masses of corpses. (Mat. 27: 33; Mark 15: 22; John 19: 17) which had also appeared earlier in his poem “The Tower of Skulls”: “These layers of piled-up skulls... through my thin hands they touch my eyes.” The ‘tower of skulls’ offers a mixture of language and images, Christian and Jewish associations.

The poetic method of essencing thought in language is influenced by Rosenberg’s other artistic talent: painting. Hence, he is associated with a “painterly eye” and, Ian Parsons asserted, no one can “read far in Rosenberg’s poetry without becoming aware of the fact that he was a painter-poet.”¹⁵ However, all similar arguments are inspired by Sassoon’s foreword to *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* where he made the earliest reference to this propensity:

¹⁵ Ian Parsons (ed.), *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), p. xxi. See also Avner Azriel Fellner, “The Life and Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg”, Unpublished Masters Thesis, George Washington Univ., p 18 and pp. 15-18; for similar allusions see Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes’ Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1965), p.113; and Fred Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War* (London: Associate Univ. Press, 1988), p. 191.

Scriptural and sculptural are the epithets I would apply to him often he saw things in terms of sculpture, but he did not carve or chisel; he *modelled* words with fierce energy and aspiration, finding ecstasy in form, dreaming in grandeurs of superb light and deep shadow; his poetic visions are mostly in sombre colours and looming sculptural masses. Watching him working with words, I find him a poet of movement; words which express movements are often used by him and are essential to his natural utterance.¹⁶

Sassoon's descriptions might even be traced back to Rosenberg's letters and prose. Echoing Sassoon's last idea of movement, Rosenberg once said: "this is brought about through movement, the rapid succession of images and thought, as in nature itself." (*CW*, 291). Indeed, this is a central propensity of Rosenberg's poetry; it moves quickly from image to image, through thought and nature. Hence, it goes beyond the mere influence of painting on poetry to include as well the relation between these elements.

In the prose piece on "The Pre-Raphaelite and Imagination at Paint", Rosenberg argued that "Whatever the subject, nature is always our resort, a basis for creation. To feel and interpret nature, to project ourselves beyond nature through nature." (*CW*, 298). Again he associates 'hearing' and 'seeing':

Poetry and music achieve that end through the intellect and the ear; painting and sculpture through the eye. The former possess advantages which the latter do not; and the latter, *vice versa*. Painting is stationary while poetry is motion. Through the intellect the motion is enchained; feeling made articulate transmits its exact state to the reader. Each word adapts itself to the phase of emotion, (I include sensation of the soul) and carries one along from degree to degree. (*CW*, 298)

Then Rosenberg's images are subjects for the intellect, to be ways into the mind and beyond it. The same idea recurs in the prose piece on "Art", where the poem functions through movement unlike painting which "is stationary, it only begins a process of thought." (*CW*, 291). In painting images in words, he exploits the advantages of graphic art:

painting can only give the moment, the visual aspect... By imagination in paint we do not encroach on the domain of the writer; we give what the

¹⁶ Siegfried Sassoon, a foreword to Parsons (ed.), p. ix.

writer cannot give, with all his advantages, the visible aspect of things, which the writer can only suggest, and give that aspect a poetic interest.(*CW*, 298).

Rosenberg simply asserted that “We are apt to confuse imagination with literature”(CW, 298), a matter that possibly has its roots in the Pre-Raphaelite interest in representing poetry in paint. The images become, rather than simply ‘words’, paintings that are meant to speak, a poetic attitude that uncovers a distinctive vision, which in the case of Rosenberg proves a transcendental understanding of poetic language.

By exploiting the visual and the aural, a more advanced level of perception develops. The poet combines words and images, language and pictures, where poetry becomes a language that paints. It is to be noted also that the image is not presented for mere visual delight but also for intellectual appreciation. This is central in Rosenberg’s constant emphasis on the mixture of thought and images. Hence “the best poet was not the photographer... but the creative painter.”¹⁷ Rosenberg, the poet, is such a creative painter; the language of his poetry *poses* him as such through the rapid skimming of images and thought: Consider Moses’s soliloquy:

See in my brain
What madmen have rushed through,
And like a tornado
Torn up the tight roots
Of some dead universe.
The old clay is broken
For a power to soak in and knit
It all into tougher tissues
To hold life,
Pricking my nerves till the brain might crack,
It boils to my finger-tips,
Till my hands ache to grip
The hammer - the lone hammer
That breaks lives into a road
Through which my genius drives.
Pharaoh well peruked and oiled,
And your admirable pyramids,
And your interminable procession

¹⁷ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Poetry Of Vision: Five Eighteenth-Century Poets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967) , p. 8.

Of crowded kings,
 You are my little fishing rods
 Wherewith I catch the fish
 To suit my hungry belly.

(Lines 29-50)

The invitation to “see in my brain” is deliberately vague; the preposition denotes both movement (into) and situation (inside), motion and stasis, as the ‘rapid skimming’ both continues and is arrested. Furthermore, the subject of ‘have rushed through’ is ambiguous, poised between ‘the madmen’ and what they have expedited, a policy, or a pogrom, even. In any case, the interfering madmen have killed the past, having “torn up the tight roots/ Of some dead universe”; and the poet must then recreate it: ‘knit/ It all into tougher tissues,’ ‘all’ suggesting the collective past. The manual effort required emerges in “Till my hands ache to grip/ The hammer”; the artist becomes artisan “essenced to language”, existing through images, letting images speak for him. ‘Peruked and oiled’ designate cosmetics; wearing wigs and using make-up, faces being ‘oiled’ with paint, bears a further reflection on a society made-up of superficial appearances.

Rosenberg’s fusion of the visual and the audible, benefiting from the advantages of painting in designating the material aspect of things, and avoiding the ‘stationary’ nature of painting, permitted him to exploiting the advantages of poetic language in transmitting the image to a level of artistic, along with the visual, delight. Consider “Louse Hunting”:

Nudes - stark and glistening,
 Yelling in lurid glee. Grinning faces
 And raging limbs
 Whirl over the floor one fire.
 For a shirt verminously busy
 Yon soldier tore from his throat, with oaths
 Godhead might shrink at, but not the lice.
 And soon the shirt was aflame
 Over the candle he’d lit while we lay.

(Lines 1-9)

The key to the effect here is the initial bare choice of ‘Nudes’ to describe the bodies of the soldiers, for in the plural, the term is art historical, the end product of the drawing class’s raw material. In other poems, he also poses as a painter whose words

are meant to depict scenes such as that drawn in “Marching (as Seen From The Left File)”:

My eyes catch ruddy necks
Sturdily pressed back -
All a red brick moving glint.
Like flaming pendulums, hands
Swing across the khaki -
Mustard-coloured khaki -
To the automatic feet.

(Lines 1-7)

The poet's ‘eyes ‘catch’ the movement of the drill, and translate that vision into the rhythms of the ‘automatic feet’ of the platoon, and of the poem's metre. There is a precision, and yet behind the discipline some laxity exists; ‘back’ for instance, might announce the uniform display of the hind part of neatly ironed battle-dress, or the necks of the soldiers ‘pressed’ rearward on parade. What he sees, mostly in colours, might even be termed ‘visionary’: “I saw in prophetic gleams.” (“Daughters Of War”); hence, his technique is not of a photographer but rather of a creative painter. Instead of using brushes and paints, he ‘models’ words to denote colours and ‘masses’, drawing an image so that the reader should avoid thinking merely about its physical aspect but should also consider its intellectual dimension. In other words, it was an attempt to ‘see behind the brows’, to achieve ‘intellectual delight’, so that ‘essenced language’ becomes a matter of translating distinctive visual effect into words.

In “Who Loses the Hour of the Wind?”, Rosenberg makes this perception clear:

Blown words, whose root is the brain,
Live over your ruined root.
For other mouths is the fruit.

(Lines 11-3)

This designates a poet's revisions of past poets, but also represents a scattered language as a way of thinking about the universe: “Blown words, whose root is the brain”. Walter Benjamin's idea of natural language bears similar perceptions: “All expression, in so far as it is a communication of mental meaning, is to be classed as

language this mental being communicates itself *in* language and not *through* language. Language is the mental being of things.”¹⁸ This is one way of seeing Rosenberg’s idea of ‘thought’ essenced to language, for as Benjamin claimed, “the word is simply the essence of things,” which, on one hand, has a Biblical sense of language being an act of naming things, and those names themselves being the essence of things.¹⁹ On the other hand, by naming (essencing (to) language), the poet communicates his ‘thought’ about the essence of the thing he names:

There is a language of sculpture, of painting, of poetry. Just as the language of poetry is partly, if not solely, founded on the name language of man, it is very conceivable that the language of sculpture is founded on certain kinds of thing language, that in them we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language, which may still be of the same sphere. We are concerned here with nameless, nonacoustic languages, languages issuing from matter; here we should recall the material community of things in their communication.²⁰

In the mixture of painting and language the poet poses as a mental observer of the things about the material nature of which he thinks in relation to the ‘mind’. “The language of an entity is the medium in which its mental being is communicated,” said Benjamin.²¹ (The word ‘communicated’ in Benjamin’s statement can be substituted by Rosenberg’s ‘essenced’, especially in relation to poetic language).

The Influence of Anxiety

In “Raphael”, Rosenberg, asserts:

I can paint on and on, and still paint on.
Another touch, and yet another touch,
Yet wherefore? ‘Tis Art’s triumph to know this.
...

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Essays*, trans. Edmond Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London : NLB, 1979), pp. 108; 112.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

To know the very moment of our gain,
And fix the triumph with reluctant pause.

(Lines 2-11)

Rosenberg wrote this poem in 1912 while still studying at the Slade School of Art, and it seems to outline the shadow art was casting over his selfhood, his free-will. For him, creativity was always a means for achieving individuality; but he came to understand that that achievement had its own costs, too. In the winter of 1911-2, he wrote on "The Slade and Its Relation to the Universe", and said:

What is the Slade? You don't know yet. Well, I can't find it in my heart to blame you... I have been a student there, and so I ought to know.... The first day... I only succeeded in getting myself grabbed by a student... who told me the model was taken ill... I ran across some stray waifs of youthful males descending to the lower regions [where] the atmosphere became distinctly more masculine. (*CW*, 300).

The life-drawing class took place in the basement, presumably because it was warmer there; but Rosenberg makes the descent into the 'lower regions' into a kind of rite, a journey into an Inferno, and those who accompany him, the 'stray waifs' announce the kind of limbo state to which the Slade brought its members:

If we consider the Slade as it stands related to modern art we will find one fundamental principle exemplified - one guiding law, one fact... that it is a circle revolving round the rock of fixity. (*CW*, 300)

Rosenberg developed this idea a few lines later, when he claims that the Slade is patriarchal in nature, which placed constraints on the artist's personality:

This is the paradox of the Slade: to be ourselves we must not forget others - but forget ourselves. We must not look at nature with the self-conscious, mannered eye of a stylist, whose vision is limited by his own personal outlook, but assimilate the multifarious and widened vision of masters... which simply means a total sinking of all conscious personality. (*CW*, 301)

The 'masters' belong to the past, and Rosenberg believes that any "great genius is, at once, the product and the creator of his age. It is in him that a marked stage of evolution is fulfilled"; the artist's ideas "weaken" when they "no longer have their original force." (*CW*, 290). Indeed, Rosenberg insisted on the necessary relation between art and life; in the same piece he wrote: "Art widens the scope of living by increasing the bounds of thought... art is an intensification and simplification of

life.” (CW, 291). Therefore, he asserted that art should mix representations of nature with thoughts on the outside world, “[having] a greater interest for the mind... Mere representation is unreal, is fragmentary.” (CW, 299).

The title of Rosenberg’s poem, ‘Raphael’, alludes to that figure to whom a group of painters, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, sought to place themselves as precursors. He was much drawn to their work, and offered an account of it in his review of “The Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition”:

an indignant protest against the art around, and both a revival, a return to the principle of a form of art apparently forgotten... The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, temperamentally disgusted with the affectations, the low sentiment, the want of spiritual fervour and sincerity which was guiding Art, saw all this in the early Italians, and taking nature as material and guide,... strove to see these qualities in nature, and interpret nature on these principles. (CW, 283-4)

They represented simultaneously a ‘revival’ and a ‘return’, to the values of Quattrocento art, in Rosenberg’s words, “the relation of art to conduct.” (CW, 284). He saw in such artists the ‘reluctant pause’ from current ideals of which he speaks in his poem, that which in his prose turns out as a revolt against the “soullessness of Raphael - ‘O, if he hadn’t lived’, then art continued uninterrupted - of the crying need of a return to the men before Raphael.” (CW, 284).

The Pre-Raphaelites, Timothy Hilton has argued, thought “not only about what art should look like, but what it should *do* The attempt to paint contemporary social life and its problems.”²² Rosenberg’s own idea of art’s relation to conduct develops out of a recognition of the moral value of the Pre-Raphaelites’ mastery of technical exactness in the representation of natural detail. He discusses a representative painting, John Millais’s “Mariana”, but his comment applies to the Pre-Raphaelites in general:

The most astonishing for technical achievement is Millais’s ‘Mariana at the Moated Grange’[sic.]... in minuteness of detail and exquisiteness of finish...

²² Timothy Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 140.

Ingenuity of imagination is the prime requisite in their design... They imagined nature, they designed nature. They were so accurate in design that the design is not felt... we are projected into an absolutely new atmosphere that is real in its unreality. (*CW*, 285).

Once again Rosenberg's fascination with 'minuteness of detail and exquisiteness of finish' makes itself felt, as the 'nature' is worked into 'art'. The painting shows Mariana standing stretching her back, after having spent too long on her embroidery. The sampler she has been stitching represents various flowers and leaves; strewn over it, and on the floor at her feet, are fallen sycamore leaves. Has she been copying them into her tracery, or are they somehow emblematic of her own rejection? She arches her back and turns away from the window; the stained-glass inserts show the Annunciation, and carry a Latin inscription: *In coelo quies*, meaning "in Heaven there is rest". The detail is extraordinary; but for Rosenberg it simply suffocates the real, replacing it with a vacuum of unreality.

"Mariana" is an illustration of Tennyson's poem of the same title, and is typical of the Pre-Raphaelites' interest in illustrating literary works: "a special development in the history of the idea (first formulated by Horace) of *ut pictura poesis*, the theory that poetry and painting are sister arts, fulfilling much the same function, and consequently that a text can illustrate a picture as much as a picture a text."²³ Indeed, this idea of illustration can be seen as another case of 'intertextuality', echo, allusion, influence or revision.²⁴ Rosenberg's discussion of "Mariana" includes a reference to Millais's "Isabella", a much earlier canvas: "the subject was chosen from Keats, Lorenzo and Isabella". (*CW*, 285), a painting which illustrates the line "And many a jealous conference had they." (line 169) by depicting a supper meeting of Isabella, her two 'jealous' brothers and Lorenzo. Once again it is the collision between verisimilitude and unreality which drew Rosenberg's eye.²⁵ Everything point to the future course of event: Isabella and Lorenzo are eating a blood-orange; while the plate in front of them is decorated with a beheading scene

²³ Ibid., pp. 49; 50; 65.

²⁴ On this see J Hillis Miller, *Illustration* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992)

²⁵ Quotations from Keats are from *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958)

from the Old Testament (Judith and Holofernes, or David and Goliath). And it is no accident that in the background, on the balcony behind the lovers, sits a large terracotta pot; the final resting place of Lorenzo's head. Taken together, the details are essenced to the language of Boccaccio's story, as retold in Keats's poem.

Consequently, certain Keatsian echoes may have been incorporated into Rosenberg's poem: Keats says: "But it is done" (line 157) which is alluded to in the first line of "Raphael": "I have done; it should be done." The lovers appear in Keats's poem "As two close Hebrews in that land inspired" (line 471); and after Lorenzo's death, Isabella, just like the beloved model in Rosenberg's poem (lines 21-2), "patient sat". (line 471). Not surprisingly, perhaps, Rosenberg himself attempted a version of the same narrative; his painting "The Murder of Lorenzo" depicts Isabella's brothers, one holding Lorenzo from the neck and the other stabbing him with a knife from behind, an illustration of the following lines of Keats: "And at the last, these men of cruel clay/ Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone" (173-4).

Equally attractive to Rosenberg was the fact that the Pre-Raphaelites frequently adopted a pastoral theme, (whether as superficial portrayal of the shepherd's life, or through the sensation of class difference). William Holman Hunt, whose name features throughout Rosenberg's writings on the Pre-Raphaelites, reveals interest in the shepherd's existence in "The Hireling Shepherd", "Our English Coast" and "The Scapegoat"; and his representations of roaming livestock are as much about the failure of the pastoral impulse as its celebration, for the animals are straying through neglect. The Pre-Raphaelites' interest in rural life is to be seen in light of what Hilton considered a concern for "the harmful effects on very ordinary people of an unjust society" and in "the emancipation of working people."²⁶ Hence, Millais's "Christ in the House of his Parents", controversially depicted the house of the boy Christ as a carpenter's shop, down to the last wood-shaving. The details of these class representations must have appealed to Rosenberg, the East End boy. As Jason Sommer puts it: "the pre-Raphaelites offered Rosenberg examples of

²⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

both the generalized diction of religious quest, which was relevant to his poetic and personal situation, and a hint of the pastoral and Edenic which he developed more fully in his own work."²⁷

But there is more in "Raphael" than the personal allusion to his allegiances with the pre-Raphaelites. He begins the poem with "Dear, I have done it; it shall be done..." which seems a response whose interlocutor is ambiguous; it might be a member of his family, a friend or even a patron who encouraged him to continue painting, as the rest of the poem seems to support. (This sense of responding to an argument antecedent to the poems is reflected in frequent appearance of conjunctions at the beginnings of Rosenberg's poems. For example, "Heart's First Word" begins with "And"; and "Sensual" begins with "Or"). Rosenberg makes painting a proper allegory for his theme of change:

What have we done - in these long hours, my love?
Long - long to you - whose patient labour was
To sit, and sit, a statue, movelessly.
Love we have woven a chain more glorious
Than crowns or Popes - to bind the centuries.

(Lines 20-4)

Yet his revolt is, though a break from tradition, a continuity of the trend; 'a chain... to bind the centuries' is the continuity and 'more glorious than crowns and popes', is the discontinuity. 'Movelessly' here might be an echo of Shelley's "Queen Mab":

...to stand
A monument of fadeless ruin there;
Yet peacefully and movelessly it braves
The midnight conflict of the wintry storm

(VII, lines 260-3)²⁸

But the echo is elusive; it seems to mock the idea of immortality in art.

Repeating through imitation means that "It mocked my hand." Change is not so difficult; it turns out to be 'reluctant' no more:

²⁷ Jason F. Sommer, "Lamp In His Blood: Some Jewish Motifs In The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Saint Louis Univ. 1985, p. 8.

²⁸ Quotations from Shelley are from *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Neville Rogers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

There - there - before my eyes and in my brain
 Limned perfect - but my fingers traitors were.
 Could not translate, and heartsick was the strife.

(Lines 32-4)

The poet's new perception stems, not from imitation, but rather from understanding its failure; the realisation that certain things, if 'limned perfect', already are inimitable, when the word 'limned' denotes the sense of illuminating, depicting and painting in gold and colours, a representation that is beyond revision. This can also be seen in light of what Harold Bloom called 'fear of marking' the source of influence; the sense that the anxiety against the precursor imposes psychological challenges on the belated poet as he revises a strong rival whom he tries to suppress in the new poem..²⁹ The poet sees through what he hears; but he tries to hide the voice of the precursor: "But you said nothing, sweet, and I forgot." (Line 26)

Rosenberg is searching for other possibilities: "But where there's sun there's shade!" (line 56) an image that fits both the allegorical frame of art (light and dark colours in painting) and, what Philip Hobsbaum calls the larger truth beyond the literal part of allegory, the infinity of artistic possibilities.³⁰ It is also clear that while claiming change, Rosenberg builds on tradition in a sort of renewal or rebirth. He announces that "Yea, world on world is forming in my brain", (line 52) with the past being placed into a context of 'doubt' and questioning:

Who lives? - see this, it is my hand - my name.
 But who looks from the canvas, no - not me.
 Some doubt of God - but the world lives who doubts?
 Even thus our own creations mock at us.
 Our own creations outlive our decay.

(Lines 58-62)

Artists and readers are asked to look for more than traditional treatments; simply repeating a familiar perception, another 'canvas', causes the artist a loss of identity; and, in the case of the reader, recognising only the traditional part in this proposed

²⁹ Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 75-6.

³⁰ Hobsbaum, p. 24.

mixture of tradition and talent means one more loss of identity. A clear allusion to Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" is evident: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." But Rosenberg includes also a revision of the immortalising power of art; the God subjected to doubt might be the precursor and those who read this with an eye for the individual talent will find that "it is my hand, my name"; but those who are interested in appearances and are unable to see the change which "looks from the canvas" will not. Stating Shakespeare's immortality in art, "Our creations outlive our decay," Rosenberg is also aware that "Even our creations mock at us" which perhaps carries an allusion to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*: "We are mocked with art" (Act V, Sc. III, 86). The play offers a source for Rosenberg's image of the beloved (model) as a 'statue' sitting 'patiently', as Paulina reports:

O, patience:
The Statue is but newly fix'd; the Colour's
Not dry.

(Act V, Sc. III, 60-2).

Despite his conservatism towards immortality through art, Rosenberg desires to be made famous by his own art; hence he is aware of the psychological aspects of the attitude such represented in Shakespeare's sonnet. The word 'creations' enriches the statement, adding other possibilities such as procreation; hence, the idea of 'doubt of God' might then be a reflection on man's attempt to be a God through immortality achieved in art or by generation. Many possibilities exist here in what seems an act of putting the reader in 'doubt'. And Rosenberg believes that "the world lives who doubts" (line 60).

Within such a deliberate sense of 'doubt', the poet seems worried about his identity, as reflected in the proposed new treatment of tradition, to be acknowledged and appreciated. This is explained in his prose piece on Emerson:

We ask in a poet a vigorous intellect, a searching varied power that is itself, and an independent nature

....The world is too full of echoes and we seize on the real voice. Does it happen that the real voice is sometimes not heard or is mistaken for an echo? It not infrequently happens that the real voice, sickened by echoes

and shy of its own sound, withdraws and only calls to ears it is its delight to call to. (*CW*, 288).

As for the influence of Emerson, Rosenberg's "Ode to David's Harp" is reminiscent of Emerson's "The Harp" in which Emerson speaks of a musician whose "wisdom will not fail" (line 2), which, in turn, recalls Rosenberg's "song that would not fail" in "Lines Written in an Album". Emerson speaks of hearing the past:

On its mystic tongue,
With its primeval memory
Reporting what old minstrels told
And some attain his voice to hear
And what of that all-echoing shell
Which thus the buried Past can tell

(Lines 51-62)

And Rosenberg speaks of David's inspiration, echoing Emerson in words and ideas:

Many a minstrel fame's elated
Envies thee thy harp of fame,
Harp of David - monarch minstrel,
Bravely - bravely, keep thy name.

...

Accents sweet and echoes sweeter

(Lines 16-30)

Clearly evident here is Rosenberg's preoccupation with identity and 'influence' ('name' and 'echoes'). Significantly, in the previous quotation from his prose piece on Emerson, Rosenberg reveals his fear of being identified by readers who would seek to emphasise the echoes of his precursors more than his own talent. The piece also reveals Rosenberg's desire for the 'hidden'; that is for hiding himself. Aware of echoes of the past in his work, he, in "Raphael", hopes this would not impede the recognition of his independent nature:

'Tis true I love my labour, and the days
Pass pleasantly,
But what is it I love in it - desire
Accomplished? Never have I reached
The halfway of the purpose I have planned.

(Lines 65-9)

Rosenberg knew that many of his phrases were borrowed from his precursors; but he also wanted to go beyond such echoes towards his own additions. He knew that he

still had a long way to go, but he was determined to do so, to make his contribution, a contribution that would strive, however clumsily, to complete the past. As Bloom puts it:

The later poet provides what his imagination tells him would complete the otherwise 'truncated' precursor poem and poet, a 'completion' that is as much a misprision as a revisionary swerve is.³¹

Charles Tomlinson said that "Rosenberg shared with so many others of his generation their contempt for British mercantilism, and that English civilisation, like other civilisations that had failed and disappeared, was now doomed for extinction."³² Consequently, Rosenberg revolted against earlier interpretations of 'English civilisation', offering instead his own 'book of knowledge'; a poetry in which he reveals his own interpretation. Consider *Moses*:

Who has made of the forest a park?
Who has changed the wolf to a dog?
And put the horse in harness?
And man's mind in a groove?

(Lines 146-9)

The lines reveal the earlier civilisations Rosenberg had lost; they show how, rather than forests, wild wolves and horses, as an urban Jew he knew only the tamed, cultivated versions: the city, park, dog and horse in a harness. Rosenberg talks of a 'groove' - not a 'grove'; such a distant echo of a forest seems to announce a rueful recognition of the urbanisation of man's thought. Rosenberg spent most of his life in the city, and hence it is more than likely that the sources of his vision are merely vicarious reminiscences of his pastoral precursors, both artists and poets. Sommer argued that "the pastoral Rosenberg was coming from was traditional in many elements. Centrally, in the pastoral pre-war poems, of course, was idealized nature; even more important was a conception of an Edenic Golden Age."³³ Sommer investigated the sources of what he considered a traditional pastoral sense, arguing

³¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 66-7.

³² Charles Tomlinson. *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol*, the fifty-third pamphlet of the Bristol Branch of Historical Association Local History Pamphlets, 1982, p. 11.

³³ Sommer, p. 138.

that it is not "rural England in actual or literary form; but rather to be found in his Jewish heritage. It is chiefly bound up with Jewish imagery."³⁴ Nevertheless, Sommer is aware that Rosenberg's pastoral is also partly drawn from his contacts with literature and art: "given the extent of his involvement in the English countryside in comparison with Owen, Blunden, Thomas or Sassoon, the literary and cultural associations with versions of pastoral may be judged the greatest influence on Rosenberg."³⁵ In accepting the influence of Rosenberg's Jewish culture and his readings in English literature and art, Sommer's argument becomes more appealing. The Jewish influence then discussed along with the literary one:

his readings in the Romantics and the pre-Raphaelites and the English tradition at large but another extremely strong source is Jewish religion and culture... Beyond that involvement with the Jewish Bible.... Rosenberg surely was influenced in pastoral directions by the Jewish holiday cycle. The Jewish festivals carried all signs of the husbandman's culture that existed in pre-Diaspora Israel. They celebrate the seasonal cycle of planting and harvest.³⁶

It was discussed in Chapter One that Zionism developed pastoral terminology of growth and rebirth in relation to the return to Zion, a methodology Rosenberg adopted. Sommer, though not suggesting Rosenberg's Zionist thought, argued that pastoral associations were evident in the Zionist movement: "For the rise of the movement, seeking to end that exile, had its strong pastoral element, representing a return by the Jewish people not just to the land of Israel, but to the land itself."³⁷ Nonetheless, this investigation of the sources of Rosenberg's pastoral should not overshadow his attempt to develop an individual voice of his own, so evident in his frequent statements on revising the past, and clearly influenced by his urban surroundings, which is part of a long history of city life the Jews witnessed since the Diaspora.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 143-4.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 145.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

In "A Worm Fed on the Heart of Corinth" Rosenberg says:

A worm fed on the heart of Corinth,
 Babylon and Rome:
 Not Paris raped tall Helen,
 But this incestuous worm,
 Who lured her vivid beauty
 To his amorphous sleep.
 England! Famous as Helen
 Is thy betrothal sung.

(Lines 1-8)

Aimee Wiest commented on the worm:

The worm in "A Worm Fed on the Heart of Corinth," free from human concerns, erodes civilisation because it is embedded and hidden. The worm not only destroys mortals, but its effects are not felt until the entire superstructure crumbles from within. Disintegration, Rosenberg's essential thematic concern, acts as a reminder that humanity endures even death.³⁸

Indeed, the poem goes even further than that. The legend of the rape of Helen by Paris was the cause of a series of wars that led to the fall of Troy; but the legend also contributed to major epics, such as *The Odyssey*, and is hence at the essence of European culture.³⁹ English culture in the future, as Rosenberg expected it, would be shaped by the crushed sections of the society, the working class, the immigrants, as represented in the worm. The poem clearly alludes to Blake's "The Sick Rose", with its 'invisible worm' associated with 'secret' destruction of England⁴⁰; but also displays a typical Rosenbergian fascination, since habitually, his eye was drawn to the minute, even in respect of fauna. As well as worms, his poetry features most famously lice, fleas and rats. ("A Worm Thought Flickers", "Louse Hunting", "The Flea" and "Break of Day in the Trenches"). For Rosenberg, poetry was mainly only

³⁸ Wiest, p. 192.

³⁹ For a fine account of the development of representations of the Trojan war in English, see John Richardson, *Falling Towers: The Trojan Imagination in the Waste Land, The Dunciad, and Speke Parott* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992)

⁴⁰ Frank Field alleged that this poem reflected Rosenberg's idea of the British Empire's ambitions as having been a causality towards the Great War. In this sense England might be seen as the enemy of Rosenberg's pacifistic principles. See Frank Field, *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. press, 1991), p. 229.

ever a domain of mental exercise, by which the great was made small, and by which the mind was released from a pre-determined 'groove'. Rosenberg's revision of his precursors is executed by means of an allusive and diminishing language that requires a transcendental awareness of its transparency and contingency, so that allusions to identity, race, religion, class and creativity might be 'essenced to it'. This is exactly what Wimsatt called "the verbal icon" in which language becomes "a way" and the poem "a songway", or as previously suggested, the womb for the reader's metamorphosis; and hence, the reader is to exploit his 'mind's eye' in interacting with the poem before, if possible, achieving the end.⁴¹ Such a revision is revealed within the poems themselves, as is the case with the addresses to the reader hinting at the hidden "secret stabs in words, in looks, in gestures." *The Amulet* (line 145). This itself 'stabs' at the heart of Rosenberg's art, where a new landscape of the mind is presented, an English mind revised by "an iron shepherd," ("Dawn") who encompasses the poet's (and consequently the reader's) search for the implied, hidden and suggested. That is to say, Rosenberg's verse is always 'essenced' to that which is unsaid; and only ever implies the margins of his uniquely disparate imagination.

⁴¹ W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954), second ed. 1960, pp. X ; 8.

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